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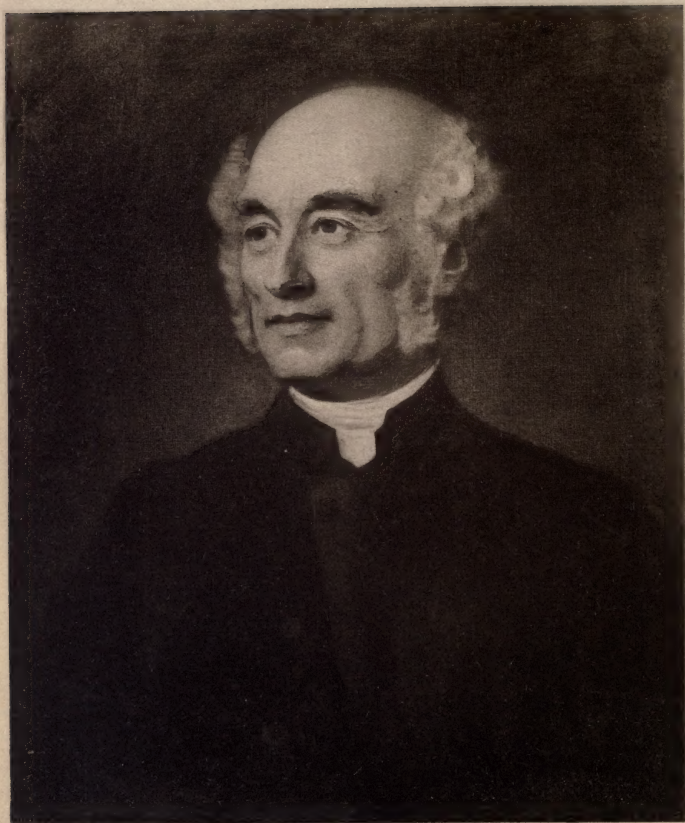
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SOME XVIII CENTURY  
MEN OF LETTERS





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*H. Weigall, pinx.*

*Walker & Cocherell, ph. sc.*

*Rev. W. Elwin.*



# SOME XVIII CENTURY MEN OF LETTERS

BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAYS BY  
THE REV WHITWELL ELWIN  
SOME TIME EDITOR OF THE  
QUARTERLY REVIEW  
WITH A MEMOIR

EDITED BY HIS SON  
WARWICK ELWIN

VOL I

MEMOIR—COWPER  
WITH PORTRAITS, ETC.

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## PREFACE

THE scheme for republishing my father's biographical contributions to the Quarterly Review dates back some forty years. That it has not been carried out sooner is owing to his own unwillingness to reprint them without extensive revision, and though he made some progress in the preparation of a few of them, he never reached the stage at which he was ready to send them to press himself. The Essays included in the present volumes are now printed with whatever alterations he had made. The unfinished condition of the addenda will be obvious in certain places; but though it is an inevitable detriment to the style here and there, the value of the Lives is enhanced by the additional work he had bestowed on them. An introductory note is affixed to each, stating the date of publication of the original article in the Review, and the extent and nature of the changes which it subsequently received at his hands.

In my father's own revisions he appended references to authorities, and, both for the sake of uniformity, and to render the work more useful to students, these have been in some degree completed, in notes within brackets, in the portions which he had not touched himself.

Whether a life that is deliberately spent in retirement is a fitting subject for biography may be open to question. My father would certainly have wished that no formal Memoir of him should be written. It was, however, urged

by those whose opinion deserves the fullest consideration, that, whereas his literary work entitled him to a high place among the writers of the nineteenth century, his self-chosen seclusion had prevented his being known as he should be to the present generation, and that this made it more than ordinarily important to introduce the Essays by a sketch of the author. If the choice was to lie between leaving his critical biographies unpublished, and allowing a biography of himself to be put before them, it was impossible not to accept the second alternative. As my father had destroyed most of his correspondence and personal records, and as nearly all his closest friends had passed away before him, much valuable material, both written and oral, has been lost; but, in spite of this, the sketch, once begun, has inevitably grown into a tolerably complete Life.

Besides information given by the family and friends, and valuable advice by impartial critics, the writer is indebted to the publisher, Mr. John Murray, for correspondence spread over the many years during which his father and mine were associated with each other, as well as for assistance on many incidental points. My father's nearly lifelong friend, Miss Holley, has lent letters covering intermittently a space of half a century. Other letters kindly put at the service of the Memoir have been those written to the Countess of Westmorland, lent by her daughter, Lady Rose Weigall; some to Lord Brougham, lent by the Right Hon. Baron Brougham and Vaux; some early ones to his sister, furnished by her son, the Rev. Edward Symonds; and a few miscellaneous ones contributed by various friends.

The Essays chosen for these two volumes are those relating to Men of Letters of the eighteenth century. If they meet with a favourable reception, there is a further



instalment in view, comprising an unfinished Memoir of Thackeray, the military sketches of Lord Raglan and the Napiers, and critical notices of writers belonging to a later date than those who form the subjects of the present series.

My father's literary work was entirely in connection with the publishing house in Albemarle Street, and that he wrote what he did was largely owing to Mr. Murray's influence. The republication of the Essays is therefore, in some sort, a memorial of the affectionate friendship of which they were in great measure the fruit. It is a personal pleasure that, in their new form, they link together the next generation of sons, who recall their own and each other's fathers with admiration.

W. E.

BOOTON RECTORY

*March, 1902*





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# MEMOIR OF WHITWELL ELWIN

## CHAPTER I

1816—1840

EARLY YEARS—MARRIAGE—ORDINATION

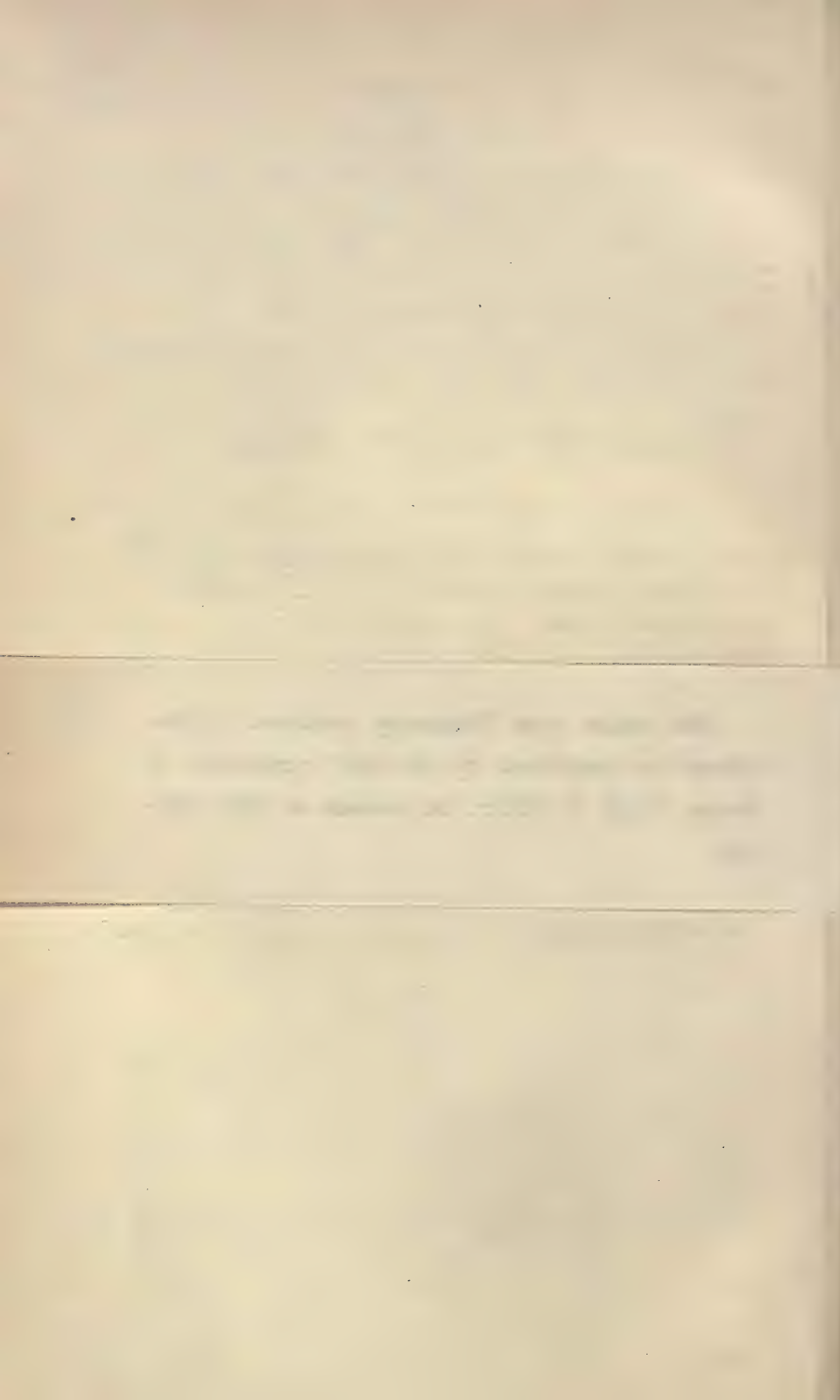
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at the Conquest, but they seem nevertheless to have clung resolutely to their native county. In the reign of Queen Elizabeth a Peter Elwin was chief steward to the Earl of Sussex, who held the Manor of Thurning, in Norfolk,<sup>2</sup> and here it was that the Elwins had a little estate, which was inherited by Whitwell's father, a direct descendant of the chief steward.

A second small property, at Booton, a few miles from Thurning, had come into the same line of inheritance

<sup>1</sup> Mumford, *Analysis of the Domesday Book of Norfolk*, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> Blomefield's *Norfolk*, vol. viii. p. 280.



# MEMOIR OF WHITWELL ELWIN

## CHAPTER I

1816-1840

### EARLY YEARS—MARRIAGE—ORDINATION

WHITWELL ELWIN belonged to an old Norfolk family. Indeed, if his ancestors may be recognised under the kindred spelling of *Alwinus*, they were already landowners in East Anglia as far back as the days of Edward the Confessor.<sup>1</sup> The name does not appear on the roll of the king's tenants in Domesday Book, and they were therefore no doubt dispossessed at the Conquest, but they seem nevertheless to have clung resolutely to their native county. In the reign of Queen Elizabeth a Peter Elwin was chief steward to the Earl of Sussex, who held the Manor of Thurning, in Norfolk,<sup>2</sup> and here it was that the Elwins had a little estate, which was inherited by Whitwell's father, a direct descendant of the chief steward.

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<sup>1</sup> Mumford, *Analysis of the Domesday Book of Norfolk*, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> Blomefield's *Norfolk*, vol. viii. p. 280.



in the time of Whitwell's great-grandfather. He received it from a cousin, who died childless in 1731. This cousin's father had bought it, in 1713, from the notorious Christopher Layer, who, when practising as an attorney at the neighbouring town of Aylsham, had become his son-in-law by marrying his daughter Elizabeth.<sup>1</sup> Ten years after Layer sold Booton he was executed for his Jacobite plot.

The father of the purchaser of Booton was Peter Elwin, of Thurning, whose wife, Anne Rolfe, was granddaughter to the John Rolfe who introduced tobacco planting into Virginia. His enterprise brought him into intercourse with the American Indians, among whom was the celebrated Princess Powhattan, better known as Pocahontas. Immediately after her conversion to Christianity, in 1613, Rolfe married her, and her baptismal name, Rebecca, was afterwards given, in remembrance of their ancestress, to some of the Elwins. The marriage seems to have brought the family more than an interesting connection. A portrait of the Virginian princess, painted in 1616, shows unmistakable features characteristic of the Elwins of later generations. Whitwell Elwin himself might almost have sat as the model for the pronounced nose and rich brown eyes in the picture of Pocahontas.<sup>2</sup>

Their association with remarkable names, and the possession of a double line of descent from the Plantagenets,<sup>3</sup> does not appear to have inspired the Elwins with any ambition to push themselves into notice. Some obtained responsible posts in different professions, but for the most part they were very well content to lead

<sup>1</sup> Blomefield, vol. vi. p. 355.

<sup>2</sup> This portrait, by an unknown Italian artist, was in the possession of Whitwell Elwin.

<sup>3</sup> Foster's *Royal Lineage of our Noble and Gentle Families*, pp. 80-3.

quiet and obscure lives, principally in their own district of Norfolk. The preference for retirement was sufficiently marked to be regarded as a trait of their race, and in none was it more strongly exhibited than in Whitwell Elwin himself.

The head of the family had borne the Christian name of Peter in almost uninterrupted succession down to Whitwell's grandfather. This Peter Elwin resided at Booton Hall, where he died, on June 22nd, 1798, of a malignant fever, which three weeks before had carried off three of his daughters in a single week. He had married twice, and was the father of twenty-six children, of whom no less than seventeen died before him. Marsham, the youngest son and sixteenth child, succeeded to the properties of Thurning and Booton, at the age of fourteen. Booton Hall was turned into a farmhouse, and Marsham settled in his other Hall, at Thurning. He married and had nine children, of whom Whitwell was the fourth, born February 26th, 1816. He was named after his mother, who was one of the Yorkshire family of Whitwells.

Both parents had abilities above the average. Marsham Elwin was a very handsome man, a good speaker, of shrewd common-sense and great fearlessness. He was a benevolent squire and a diligent country gentleman, a captain in the Norfolk Militia, a magistrate, and chairman of Quarter Sessions, where cases of importance had then often to be decided. The circumstances of his time gave opportunity for the exercise of his qualities. The weaving trade was beginning to leave Norwich, and this caused much discontent and want in the city. The weavers were a rough and turbulent class, and on several occasions Marsham Elwin's tact and courage were usefully employed in suppressing their outbreaks. During some

serious machine-breaking riots, the Home Office was plied by Norfolk magistrates with applications for troops. There came with these a communication from Marsham Elwin, saying that the danger had been great, but that he thought it was past, and that the soldiers were more wanted elsewhere. Sir Robert, then Mr., Peel, who was Home Secretary, put the letters into the hands of Mr. Wodehouse, one of the members for the county, and asked which he was to attend to. "This," said Wodehouse, pointing to Elwin's. "I thought so," rejoined Peel, "I have had letters from him before, and never knew him to be wrong."

Marsham Elwin was very fond of his children, very indulgent to them, and usually tolerant of their boyish pranks, which arose from a vein of irrepressible fun inherited from himself and their mother. They did almost exactly as they liked, living out of doors with rod and gun, in grounds which were a species of lads' paradise, with a stream, and lake, and marshy woods, abounding in birds, beasts, and reptiles. Whitwell, though fond of fishing, was less of a sportsman than his three brothers, of whom two were his seniors. Even as a child he generally preferred books to play. His mother described him afterwards as "a boy with a face that ought to have been handsome but was not," "chiefly remarkable for walking about asking endless questions."

The children got very little education at home. At some period the rector of the parish, known as "Parson" Blake, gave them a few stray lessons; but they were all sent to school when they were about six years old. Whitwell's first school was at Trunch, in Norfolk. It was kept by William Rees, a Welshman, whose reputation soon after obtained for him the larger Grammar School at North Walsham, a few miles off, whither he



transferred his pupils with himself. At that time the North Walsham seminary educated boys from the chief families of the county. When railways made access to the big public schools easy, it declined, and after revisiting it in later days, when it was in a transition state, Whitwell Elwin boasted of having tipped the entire school five shillings apiece. It then contained only three pupils.

Rees was assisted by his brother Samuel, and it was from "Sam" Rees, a good scholar, of eccentric and variable humours, that Whitwell got most of his teaching. The method was that which was then in vogue everywhere—a modicum of instruction with plenty of flogging. But the North Walsham flagellations paled before those of the celebrated Keate. When one of Whitwell's schoolfellows was moved to Eton, he wrote to his old comrades to describe a birching by the head-master, and said, with boyish extravagance, "At the first stroke I literally flew yards."

"It is not an imposing-looking place," Whitwell Elwin afterwards wrote of his school, "and the associations with it are not enlivening."<sup>1</sup> The régime, indeed, was rough, the lessons less interesting and the sports less bracing than those of modern times. Though popular among the boys, he made no ardent friendships. Having two brothers older than himself already there when he went, he was protected from some of the brutality which was meted out to new-comers, but he soon found it necessary to take care of himself. He was short, square set and strong, quick to quarrel, and always ready to settle accounts in a corner of the playground which was devoted to the accommodation of differences. This earned for him the nickname of "The Badger." The head-master's daughter remembered him, after a lapse of some seventy years, for

<sup>1</sup> Letter, Dec. 12, 1859.

his bright eyes and good looks, and for his cheerfulness and good nature. He and his next elder brother, Marsham, passed for clever boys in the school. If the cleverness referred to scholastic subjects, it must, in Whitwell's case, have been in classics rather than in mathematics. In after life arithmetic baffled him, and though he learnt enough in his youth to pass necessary examinations, he can never have been proficient at figures. Towards the end of his school-days he was requested by the headmaster to hear the lessons of some of the boys, in order to fill a brief vacancy in the post of an usher. He found a tip of £5 but poor compensation for what he described as the most distasteful task he ever had to perform at school.

Even as a boy he much preferred English classics to those of Greece and Rome. Both at North Walsham and at home he read a great deal of literature of a miscellaneous character, but mostly of the rank of standard works. While other boys were at play, he would constantly be walking up and down in deep conversation with a master, or musing alone with a volume under his arm. He had been through Boswell's Johnson, always his favourite book, several times before he grew into manhood. He spent a present on purchasing Fielding's Tom Jones, which, apart from its coarseness, he ever thought the foremost of novels. It went the round of the school, and the boys read it with rapture. Outside literature, Whitwell Elwin was attracted by popular science, for which he had a hankering all his life, though his faculties were not of a scientific order. As a lad, between sixteen and seventeen, he wrote a treatise on "The Eye," in the form of a lecture. This and other boyish exercises with his pen, like most juvenile efforts, were imitative in style, distinguished only by a certain amount of familiarity with

the classical English of the works with which he was gradually saturating his mind. Next to reading and writing, he was chiefly interested in law, for which he had a natural bent. He sometimes accompanied his father to hear the trials at the Norwich assizes, and was always eager to ask questions about the cases when Marsham Elwin returned from Quarter Sessions.

While Whitwell Elwin was still at school his father fell mortally ill. For the sake of medical aid he moved, with his family, from Thurning to Thorpe Hamlet, in the environs of Norwich, about 1830. He died on June 1st, 1831, at the early age of forty-seven. His wife stayed on at Thorpe for some two years longer, and Norwich became Whitwell's haunt in vacations. It gave him some interesting experiences, for it then still retained many traces of an age that had nearly passed away. "Yours," George III. once remarked to its mayor, "is a very ancient city." "Yes, your Majesty," returned the civic dignitary, "and it was formerly much more so." Even in Whitwell Elwin's youth the march of progress, which the mayor meant to indicate by his Irish reply, had not widened its narrow streets, or removed the Tudor and Jacobean frontages of its houses, or abolished its old-world customs. During Elwin's Norwich residence he often saw the quaint mediæval processions of the Corporation, and the chairing of Members of Parliament round the market-place, their supporters following on horseback, armed with hunting-whips, which sometimes had to be used to disperse hostile assailants. He witnessed several of the riots raised by the weavers when thrown out of work; saw them tear up the paving-stones for missiles, and then fly at the clatter of an approaching troop of dragoons, the flat of whose sabres dealt blows to be remembered on the backs of the mob. He sometimes attended the



civic banquets, at one of which he heard a memorable speech from the mayor, prepared to be delivered in the ornate oratory of the day. "Had I," said he, "the wisdom of a Socrates, had I the eloquence of a Demosthenes, had I the reason of a Plato,—really gentlemen, you must excuse me; I have forgotten the rest."

What interested him more than the local scenes was the opportunity of hearing celebrated barristers and judges at the assizes. More than forty years afterwards he recalled having heard Justice Byles, who joined the Norfolk Circuit in 1831, and remembered that he had "the character of being one of the most exact and painstaking of counsel."<sup>1</sup> He used also to tell how he had been in court when Sir William Garrow was trying a case, and a country woman who was put into the witness-box was so overpowered by his portentous appearance that she fell on her knees before him, on which Garrow exclaimed in a solemn voice, "Woman, get up, get up, reserve that position for your Maker." In Norwich, too, he heard Lord Lyndhurst, when he went his first circuit as chief baron, in 1831. He was impressed with his dignified and refined bearing, with the charm of his voice, and his ability as a judge. Many years afterwards he wrote of him, "He presided in the Nisi Prius court, and I was present while several causes were tried. In no instance did he make a single note, but summed up the evidence entirely from memory, and with a brevity and lucidity that could not be surpassed. Boy as I was, I was filled with wonder and admiration at the dexterity with which he separated every question from the mass of extraneous matter, and presented it in its simplest form for the solution of the jury." In 1858, when he became acquainted with Lord Lyndhurst, he mentioned

<sup>1</sup> To John Murray, Nov. 6, 1874.



to him this recollection of his practice. Lord Lyndhurst replied that he had deliberately set himself to acquire the art of presenting the evidence to the jury in a condensed and digested form, instead of reading the whole of it out exactly as it had been given, as was the ordinary practice with judges at that time. Lord Brougham, who was present at the conversation, remarked that, on Lord Lyndhurst's plan, "the mind was free to attend to the case, while the mind of the judge who wrote down the evidence was chained to the nib of his pen."<sup>1</sup>

Whitwell Elwin was in Norwich during the first election after the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832. He threw himself vigorously into the contest, on the Whig side, and canvassed for C. H. Bellenden Ker, who was an unsuccessful candidate. They came across one another again in 1859, at dinner with Lord Brougham, in London, when Ker recalled how, at one of the election meetings in a public-house in the city, Elwin had got worsted in an argument with a weaver on the rights of property. Defeated though he was in the polemics of the discussion, he believed he had the best cause, and remained a Whig for several years, and retained some of the doctrines of the party even when maturer reflection led him to adopt Tory principles as his main political creed.

The liberty which the boys had been allowed as children was, of course, not abated after their father was dead. Consequently the spheres of life into which Whitwell Elwin found access were most heterogeneous. The house he frequented more than any other was that of the Rev. Robert Elwin, a first cousin of his father's, an odd character, who was one of the principal movers in the musical world of Norwich. He used to entertain the

<sup>1</sup> MS. Commonplace-Book. See also Sir Theodore Martin's *Life of Lord Lyndhurst*, p. 282.

professionals who came down to the triennial festivals, and thus Whitwell met most of the chief performers of the day. Among these was Malibran, with her handsome Spanish features, her vivacious manner, and "voice of superlative beauty," but with the fiery temper of her race. He once saw her box a choir-boy's ears at a rehearsal because he pronounced the *a* in *Pater* as it is pronounced in the English alphabet. On one occasion Robert Elwin was dismayed at seeing her partake freely of almond cake just before a concert, and at his instigation Whitwell went up to her, and warned her that she would not be able to sing if she did not desist. She patted him on the cheek and bade him mind his own business, but was mortified when she came on the platform to find his prediction verified. Another celebrity whom he met at Robert Elwin's was Paganini, whom he described as a gaunt, strange-looking man, with long, lank hair, and unusually long, bony fingers. Though he appeared to play with ease, young Elwin observed that he was streaming with perspiration at the end of a performance. Paganini once told Robert Elwin that he practised eight hours a day, exclusive of public playing. It was in this kind of company that Whitwell acquired a musical taste, though it remained crude for want of cultivation. He had an imperfect, or perhaps only an untrained, ear; although he had a fine voice he did not sing, nor did he play any instrument. Nevertheless, he knew good music when he heard it, and appreciated some kinds of it greatly, though his criticisms were coloured by characteristic originality, and did not always run in the groove of common opinions.

Beyond a visit to London, some time before 1832, Whitwell Elwin's travels had not taken him much out of his native county until about 1833, when the home at Norwich was broken up. His mother moved to Paris

with her daughters to complete their education, and he went to a private tutor, Gretton by name, at Oakham, in Rutlandshire. During one of his vacations, probably in 1834, Gretton, having occasion to go to Bristol, took Whitwell with him. He got wet through on the coach, with the result that he fell ill at Bristol with rheumatic fever. A second cousin of Whitwell's, the Rev. Fountain Elwin, whom he had never seen, and possibly did not know of, was then Vicar of the Temple Church at Bristol. Gretton, noticing the name, and being embarrassed with his sick pupil, communicated with him, on the chance of his being a relative. The circumstance had an important bearing on Whitwell Elwin's future. His cousin was very kind to him, and took him into his house at Clifton. One day, in Fountain Elwin's drawing-room, he found a lady, with a daughter of pretty features and a beautiful complexion, dressed in an exceedingly plain and unfashionable attire. They were introduced to each other as relations. The mother, who had been a Miss MacGlashan, had married a Fountain Elwin, who was first cousin of his namesake of Bristol. The daughter, who bore the lengthy christian name of Frances Mary Rebecca Turner, was herself Whitwell's second cousin. He fell in love with her at first sight. He used to tell how she, at the end of the call, made him the stiffest bow that, even at the end of a long life, he ever remembered to have received from anybody. The ice was soon after partially broken at picnic parties to Tintern and Chepstow. She was a year his senior, having been born March 16th, 1815. With great contrasts in their natures, they had much that was common in their tastes. So greatly was he taken with her that he was intensely mortified when he was informed that she was already engaged. He discovered that this was a mistake by



telling her, as he was on the point of leaving Clifton, that he should have proposed to her if she had still been free. She simply replied by kissing his forehead. When the engagement began, Frances' mother said, "It is all very well, but it won't last." "It has lasted though," he wrote after a few years of married life, "and *will* last,"<sup>1</sup> and so it proved. He expressed the rapidity and completeness of the attachment in some lines, written in an album, in 1847, entitled, "On revisiting Clifton, where I first met Fan."

Where beauty here with grandeur sits  
First broke our young affection's dawn,  
If such a term that love befits  
Which gained its zenith in its morn.

It gained its height, and there it stayed,  
Nor makes a movement to decline,  
Remote alike from light or shade,  
It always shone, will always shine.

Frances Elwin's father was a lieutenant-colonel in the 44th Foot, in which he had served through the whole Peninsular war, holding several staff appointments. He was a thorough soldier, with a bad sabre-cut down his cheek, which gave as much pleasure to his mind as pain to his body. He had missed the battle of Waterloo by being left at Brussels on a court-martial. He deserted it when he could restrain his ardour no longer, and galloped to the field; but, to his lasting disappointment, he arrived too late to take any part in the action. When peace was declared he retired on half pay and settled in England. He did not altogether approve of the match between his daughter and Whitwell, but he did not withhold his consent. It was necessary, however, that the young couple should wait, for Whitwell was but nineteen, without a profession or an income.

<sup>1</sup> To his sister Mary, April 4, 1844.



Elwin had entered at Caius College, Cambridge, June 26th, 1834. His rheumatic fever probably postponed his going into residence, for, with every motive to accelerate his career, it was not till five years after, in 1839, that he took his degree. His engagement had an effect on his studies. He had originally intended to work for a fellowship, but as fellowships could not then be held by married men, he was obliged to abandon this ambition. Having no other object for going deep into the subjects of a university curriculum, he determined not to read more of them than was necessary to obtain an ordinary degree. What he cared for was English literature, and this was what he chiefly studied at Cambridge.

"Men," he once wrote, "seldom become masters in any department of knowledge unless they have learnt the rudiments of it in their youth. Taste in literature is acquired before twenty. The superstructure may be carried to any extent in subsequent years, but the foundations must have been laid early. Blomfield, Bishop of London, said to the architect who was a candidate for Orders, and who had not applied to the learned languages till he was twenty-five, 'Then your Greek is worth nothing.'"<sup>1</sup> It was certainly true of Whitwell Elwin that he had laid the foundation of his intimate acquaintance with eighteenth-century writers, in prose and poetry, before he was twenty, and at college he added largely to it. His habits of reading were calculated to make the most of a naturally retentive memory. He revolved everything he read mentally, until he had assimilated whatever he cared to hold. "Great works," he said, "should be studied till we render the author's mind part of our own, and thus our mind becomes enriched by the wealth of many minds."<sup>2</sup> What was peculiar to him,

<sup>1</sup> MS. Commonplace-Book.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

in the degree to which he carried it, was that he so remembered, not merely the substance but also the setting of his reading, that he could nearly always express himself readily in sentences taken from some great writer. He once wrote to Lord Brougham, "An excess of quotations has a bad effect in any composition, and especially in a speech."<sup>1</sup> Elwin's friends sometimes thought that he illustrated the habit he here condemned both in his conversation and his writings. But his quotations were always natural, for they were the form in which the ideas had been stored in his own brain. He had appropriated them as what particular persons had said in a particular way, but at the same time so made them part of himself that, while he cited the words and the name of the author, the passages were usually reproduced with some touch of his own originality. The practice naturally gave an eighteenth-century turn to all his phraseology and modes of thought, and the more so that it dated back to his earliest periods of study.

His two favourite authors, even when young, were Burke and Johnson. "I think," he wrote, in 1859, "Burke was the first in intellect, and the warmest in his affections. But Johnson was not far, if at all, behind. He had a vast understanding, and a heart as tender as a woman's."<sup>2</sup> These were the two he quoted from most throughout his life. Both, indeed, largely contributed to model his own literary taste. Of Burke's style he wrote, in 1858, "It has a rare majesty both in thought and expression," and is "more grandly beautiful than has ever been reached by any other Englishman with either the tongue or the pen."<sup>3</sup> Of Johnson he said, "The work

<sup>1</sup> To Lord Brougham, Sept. 26, 1858.

<sup>2</sup> Letter, Oct. 17, 1859.

<sup>3</sup> "Public Speaking," *Quarterly Review*, vol. ciii. pp. 497, 498.

from which I derived the greatest profit myself is Boswell's Life of Johnson. I know no other book which contains the same wisdom on an equal variety of subjects—none so calculated to open the mind, and give it an enlarged view of men and things.”<sup>1</sup> It was in the works of these and their like that he trained himself at Cambridge, rather than in classics and mathematics. His literary propensities earned for him the title of “The Philosopher.”

Books also, rather than men, were his university companions. He held small gatherings for the discussion, over tea and toast, of literature and questions of the day, but he made no remarkable friendships. He used to recall meeting Creasy, the historian, then a fellow of King's, with some frequency, at the rooms of a common acquaintance, and described him as a strong but not very polished man.<sup>2</sup> He was intimate with a fellow collegian at Caius, Prowett by name, who afterwards became a barrister and a contributor to periodicals, and whom he enlisted as a writer in the Quarterly Review. The only contemporary who left any lasting impression on him was Alfred Howell, a young man of high promise, who died early. Sitting next each other in hall, on the first day of their residence as undergraduates, they found that they had topics in common. Howell invited Elwin to his rooms, where he exhibited a freshly purchased hat. They were little more than boys in age, and not at all more in spirits. Elwin delighted in practical jokes, and on returning to his lodgings wrote his new friend a letter, purporting to come from the hatter, who demanded immediate payment for the hat, because he regretted to learn that Howell was not a character to be trusted. The

<sup>1</sup> Letter, Dec. 2, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> Letter, Feb. 26, 1853.



unsuspecting youth rushed off to the shop, indignantly presented the missive over the counter, and required an explanation. The shopkeeper handed it back with a smile, remarking, "I think, sir, somebody has been imposing on you."

The intercourse begun thus frivolously was continued more seriously. The two friends were both intellectual, and, being both argumentative, they exercised their abilities by taking opposite sides on disputable subjects. The Oxford Tracts for the Times, which were then in course of publication, afforded them a continuous theme for theological discussion. Howell did battle for the Tracts, which were opposed by his friend, as well for the sake of debate as from conviction. The effect was, however, to stereotype him in evangelical views, though his mind was so far open to the reasonableness of his adversary's views that his wife used to say, in later days, that if Alfred Howell had lived, and their religious intercourse had continued, her husband would not have remained a low churchman.

During one of his vacations Whitwell Elwin went over to Paris to stay with his mother. It was the only time in his life that he ever went out of England. The visit did not impress him much, partly because he obtained only a superficial glimpse of a few of the sights of Paris. What appears to have struck him most was the celebration of High Mass in the churches. "I was a boy then," he wrote in 1852, "all feeling, and no knowledge or judgment, and it seemed so imposing and solemn that I remember wishing I was a Roman Catholic."<sup>1</sup>

With the exception of this jaunt, his vacations were naturally spent in Somersetshire, where he could enjoy the society of his betrothed. Two other relatives now

<sup>1</sup> Letter, June 12, 1852.



also lived at Bath—Fountain Elwin, the good Samaritan who had tended him in his illness, and had since moved from Bristol to become minister of the Octagon Chapel, and Fountain's elder brother, Hastings, who had lately retired from the post of Attorney-General in the West Indies. Hastings Elwin went a good deal into society, and entertained guests himself. Under his hospitable roof Whitwell made the acquaintance of several persons well known in public and social life. It was probably here that he first met Lord Brougham, whom he knew early, though his intimacy with him belonged to a later period. Here he often saw Lord Camperdown, the son of the naval hero, and Lord James O'Brien, afterwards Marquis of Thomond, who had been one of the lords-in-waiting to William IV., and was full of stories about the unofficial side of the sailor king's habits.

Bath was then the hotbed of every imaginable phase of extreme evangelicalism. Much of it was of a rampant kind that has become almost, if not altogether, obsolete. Fountain Elwin was perhaps one of the best and most moderate of the popular preachers of this form of religion. His sermons were much admired, but two volumes of them, which he published in 1842 and 1849, contain little more than emotional appeals, expressed in well-turned English sentences. When Frances Elwin's mother settled in Bath, she became an earnest adherent of the evangelical party. She had hitherto taken her share in the social surroundings of an officer's wife, and had mixed among the stirring events of her time with interest. But in 1811 she closed her journal, in which she had recorded her reminiscences, with a note that when it was written she was "a child of the world, but now otherwise." The alteration in her views made her withdraw from general society. In the absence of the colonel she made her

house the resort of the leaders of pious sentiment. Her son and three daughters were brought up in Puritan principles, and Fanny—as Frances was usually called—was even more rigorous than her mother in abjuring parties, amusements, and adornments of dress. Mrs. Elwin eventually joined the Plymouth Brethren, to whom her son and a daughter had already attached themselves. An eccentric mingling of religious expressions with secular occupations was characteristic of the sect. A hymn would be sung as an interpolation in a meal. Sacred phrases were incongruously obtruded into ordinary conversation. Whitwell Elwin was fond of relating his experiences among these pious people, with a keen sense of the humour of their eccentricities. He used to tell how a prominent member of the community would call on Mrs. Elwin before lunch, and on being requested to remain and partake of the meal, always observed that he must “first ask the leave of the Lord.” It was part of the custom of devout brethren to talk glibly of the doom of the unpredestined. “Suppose I should not be one of the elect!” Mrs. Elwin once anxiously exclaimed to her minister. “Why, then, ma’am,” he replied, “you will be damned.” Her son, having been “converted to the truth” by a tract, was industrious in scattering about this kind of literature in omnibuses and down areas, or wherever else a reader was likely to be found. A prim old maid, who kept an establishment for young ladies, was much angered when she found herself thus made the recipient of “The Call of the Abandoned.”

The Church evangelicals were scarcely less sectarian in their doctrines and manners than their dissenting brethren. They, too, revelled in the horrors of reprobation. Whitwell Elwin heard a clergyman, who was preaching on Baptism, roar out from the pulpit, “I tell you there

are children in hell not a span long." He used to attend their revivalist meetings, and listen to their awakening prayers, couched in strangely familiar language. These seemed to him at once grotesque and irreverent, but he attempted to join in them, hoping that the system might be right. Yet he used to say afterwards that it made him so melancholy that he sometimes thought, if this was religion, it was a hollow and unhappy business indeed. This kind of evangelicalism, therefore, never captivated him. He had some admiration for Calvin and his writings, but the practical Calvinism of its Bath devotees offended him, as did the religious cant, the endless party squabbles, and the petty rivalries of the old ladies over their favourite pastors. Nevertheless, knowing no alternative, he kept to his low church opinions, while he was sufficiently repelled by Bath extravagances to prevent his attaching himself distinctly to the evangelical party.

It had originally been intended that Whitwell's brother, Marsham, should take Holy Orders and inherit the family living of Booton, while it was supposed that Whitwell would be likely to follow out his bent for the law. Caleb Elwin, a first cousin of their father's, was then Rector of Booton, but, being a pluralist with several livings, he had consented to relinquish this one to Marsham so soon as he should be ordained Priest. When Whitwell became engaged, and it was important for him to have something to marry upon, Marsham, who was endowed with remarkable unselfishness, relinquished his claim to Booton, gave up the intention of following the clerical career, for which he was eminently adapted, and chose the law, for which he was not particularly suited. On the other hand, Whitwell, who was cut out for the Bar, determined to be ordained. Having thus the prospect of a small country living, and Fanny Elwin having inherited a little income



on coming of age, their marriage was thought practicable in 1838. It was fixed for Waterloo Day, June 18th, and his mother and sisters came over from Paris to be present at it. The wedding took place in Marylebone Church, to the accompaniment of a thunderstorm, which filled Fanny Elwin's rather superstitious mind with alarm, as a dread portent of coming evils in their life.

Whitwell had not yet finished his University career. While he was keeping his final terms the young couple occupied lodgings in St. Mary's Passage, Cambridge. They apparently spent some of the vacations in London. He still had a hankering for the profession he had put aside, and having chosen that of a clergyman instead, he felt an instinctive desire to become chaplain of Lincoln's Inn. His holiday delight was still to visit the law courts, and his wife enjoyed them almost as much as himself. The barrister they remembered with most pleasure in later times was Sir William Follett. "He argued at the bar," he once wrote, "in the tone of a man engaged in an ordinary conversation, and Fanny and myself used to go and listen to him pleading, for the mere gratification of hearing a regular speech carried on from beginning to end in this delicious fashion. But then, as Fanny says, there was the further charm of a voice like a musical instrument."<sup>1</sup> This was his special attraction. Elwin once wrote to Murray, "I heard many of Follett's most successful efforts at the bar. His voice was delicious, and he had the easiest manner of speaking of any man I ever knew, but I never remember him to have uttered an eloquent sentence, or to have said a felicitous thing."<sup>2</sup>

At last the time came for Elwin's final examination. Having abandoned all idea of honours, he cared nothing

<sup>1</sup> Letter, Nov. 30, 1881.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, May 25, 1854.



about place, and only wanted a degree. He therefore resolved to take no more trouble than was necessary, and having ascertained the proportion of questions which was supposed to be sufficient for a pass, he answered one more than the minimum in each paper, in order to guard against accidents, and then left the senate-house to enjoy the rest of the time with his wife and his books. His rash venture proved successful, and he came out so much higher than he expected that he was for a moment disconcerted at not finding his name in the lowest class of the list.

Elwin graduated B.A. in January, 1839, and never proceeded to any higher degree. As he was of age for ordination immediately after he left Cambridge, he began to look out for a title. His mother asked Caleb Elwin to resign Booton in his favour, when he should be eligible to take it, as he had originally intended to do for his brother. There was the more reason to expect this of him that he was Whitwell's godfather. Caleb declined, but promised to hand over to him the surplus income, after the salary of the curate-in-charge had been paid, as soon as he should be ordained Priest. The curate-in-charge was next asked to resign in order that Whitwell might take his post. This he also declined to do. It was therefore necessary to look further afield for a title, and Whitwell and his wife made an expedition into the Midlands to seek a home, visiting his college friend, Alfred Howell, who had a curacy at Wolverhampton, on their way. They stopped for a time at Warwick, where their eldest son, Fountain Jeremy, was born on April 1st, 1839. At almost the last moment a title was found at All Saints' Church, Walcot, in Bath. Whitwell Elwin was therefore ordained Deacon by the Bishop of Bath and Wells, Dr. George Henry Law, in the chapel of the

Bishop's Palace at Wells, on Trinity Sunday, May 26th, 1839.

His first residence was at Entry Hill, on the confines of Bath. "I was sufficiently acquainted," he said, "with the faithlessness of the furnishing tribe to go to the upholsterer, on the morning of the day we were to remove, to ascertain that the house was in order. He answered that it would be before night, and at night we set out to our destined home, ourselves in a fly, and a quantity of odds and ends in a cart. Arrived at Entry Hill, our astonishment, our vexation, and our anger were great to find that nothing had been brought—not a bed, a table, or a chair. At ten o'clock at night we had to retrace our steps and return to the place from whence we came." "But," he added, with a philosophy which was characteristic of him in reviewing past annoyances, "these are miseries which leave no scars, and the true wisdom is not to be ruffled by them."<sup>1</sup>

On a vacancy occurring in the chaplaincy of the Bath Workhouse, Elwin applied for it and obtained the appointment. The combined duties of his curacy and the chaplaincy were probably not so arduous in those days as to prevent his having leisure to continue his reading, and to indulge in as much sociality as he cared for. The life does not seem to have been eventful, and the only reminiscence of it that he used to recall was a story about his vicar, a clergyman named Nicholls. He was a grave man without a particle of humour. Some years previously he had been taken by Wilson, the author of a *Life of Defoe*, to lunch with Charles Lamb. In the middle of the meal, Lamb paused in his conversation, regarded the impassive figure of Nicholls with an amused expression, presently took up the dish cover before him,

<sup>1</sup> To his sister Mary, Dec. 29, 1845.

and clapping it on the clergyman's head, said in solemn tones, "I crown thee."

After a little more than a year's diaconate, Whitwell Elwin was ordained Priest, in the Bishop's chapel at Wells, on September 20th, 1840. On this occasion Bishop Law, who was then an aged man, said to him, "I was once a country parson, as you will now be, with a wife and children, and the sun never shone on a happier man; but in an evil hour I was tempted to take the office of a Bishop, and have been a miserable man ever since. Now, take my advice; never accept preferment; remain as you are, and you will be happy." Elwin never forgot the counsel, and followed it implicitly.



## CHAPTER II

1840-1849

### HEMINGTON—FIRST CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE QUARTERLY REVIEW

ELWIN remained in his Bath curacy for four years. During this period he kept on maturing himself in literature. The study became the more enticing because his wife was able to share in it, and even to contribute to its scope. She had been accustomed to read a great deal aloud to her father after his return to England, and as he principally liked to hear French, with which he had grown familiar during his campaigns in the Peninsula, she had acquired from him a fondness for French books. She had also a good knowledge of Italian, and some acquaintance with Spanish. Her husband never learnt Italian, but she drew him into reading the literature of France. Her own range of authors was limited, and he soon outstepped it, until he became well versed in the principal French writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Meantime he was introducing her to English books. They even aspired to joint work at deeper things, for they attempted to read political economy together, with Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* for a text-book.

A man who is deeply versed in literature, who has an acute appreciation of style, and has leisure to reflect, is not likely to keep his own pen long out of the ink.

While he was at Entry Hill, Whitwell Elwin made his first essay in authorship. It took the form of an article for the Quarterly Review, not because he had any connection with that journal, or was known to either its editor or publisher, but only because it afforded as good an outlet for his composition as any other. Instead of resorting to his favourite English classics for a theme, he chose the simpler subject of "The Dog." The result was purely a literary exercise, for though, like all Elwins, he was devoted to animals, he had no other knowledge about dogs than that which he collected from books. Impatient to find out whether what he was writing would be accepted, he forwarded the manuscript on approval as soon as half of it was completed. Lockhart, who was then editor, wrote back, April 11th, 1843, "The subject of your paper is highly interesting, and you write so well that I hardly doubt it will, when finished, be very acceptable to the readers of the Quarterly Review." It was published in the number for the following September. Like all first productions, it is immature. But it shows something more than the germ of his later style, and of that skill in bringing a wide range of reading to bear on a particular topic, which characterised his work when he had mastered his craft.

When he was twenty-seven, Elwin accepted the curacy of Hemington, with Hardington, two villages about ten miles from Bristol. The rector was non-resident, so it was a sole charge, with the parsonage house of Hemington at his disposal. An unexpected present from a widow of one of Colonel Elwin's friends, after whom Fanny Elwin had been given one of her names, enabled them to repair and furnish the house, and thither they moved on November 18th, 1843.

They were scarcely settled down, when, in December,

there came two offers of a totally different kind of work, through Mr. E. Carleton Tufnell, who was a prime mover in matters concerned with elementary education. Parliament was beginning to give money grants to schools, and as this necessarily involved some system of State inspection, it was thought appropriate that the inspectors should be clergymen where the school was supported by members of the Church. The posts were worth £500 a year, with travelling expenses, and one of the first was put at Elwin's disposal. The second offer was that of the principalship of Battersea Training College for Teachers. The principal was to direct, not to teach, and was to have a house, rates and taxes free, light, fuel and vegetables, and £200 a year. Elwin refused both of these proposals. "As for the inspectorship," he wrote to his sister, "it is impracticable, or at least would be miserable, with Fan and the boy. Battersea is more feasible, and if we had been still upon the wide world I might have accepted it. I am thankful we are not under any such necessity. I can only be happy in peace and retirement, and what is set before me as an advantage, that it will bring me in perpetual contact with high society, is just the reason why I will have nothing to do with it. It would be desirable for anyone who desired society at all. I have no taste for any, except that of relations and friends."<sup>1</sup> It was always his doctrine that there was nothing to be gained by worldly position. He wrote to the same sister, when she was engaged to a clergyman, "The principal ingredients of what is commonly called a good match are wealth and station, both of which hinder happiness instead of promoting it. The notion that riches and rank are felicity is one of the great delusions of mankind. All that is necessary is a competence. It may

<sup>1</sup> To his sister Mary, Dec. 11, 1843.



encourage you to consider that I set out with worse prospects than yourself, and have now passed near six years of wedded life in that supreme felicity that I would not exchange my existence against the brightest moments of any earthly being.”<sup>1</sup>

Elwin entered on his Hemington life in high spirits. “I like my parish vastly,” he said, “and should think myself fortunate to spend all my days here.”<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless it was not a perfect paradise. In his pastoral work he found there was a great deal of ignorance and vice to be combated. The place was picturesquely rural, but it had the disadvantage of lying in a valley which was very damp, and this gave him troublesome attacks of asthma. The moisture brought other discomforts. “The toads,” he said, “are here in such numbers that it is like the plague of Egypt. It was very well of my Uncle Toby to say to the fly, when he buzzed about his nose, ‘Go, go, little fly; there is room enough in the world for thee and for me,’ but there is not room enough in Hemington for us and the toads. They fill our pond, cover our garden, and even force their way into the house. Upwards of a thousand were killed to-day, and the number hardly seems diminished.”<sup>3</sup> They were not the only intruders. “A troop of calves from a neighbouring field” kept making their way into the domain. He had bought a gun before he went into the country, probably as a warning to thieves. “It is a famous scatterer,” he said, when he tried it, “casting its contents for a circle of twenty yards. This is just the thing for me, who cannot aim with nicety.”<sup>4</sup> After some weeks of the calves’ invasion, “being wearied beyond expression with running after them perpetually,” he said, “I bethought myself that I might convert my

<sup>1</sup> The same, Jan. 24, 1844.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Dec. 11, 1843.

<sup>3</sup> The same, April 4, 1844.

<sup>4</sup> The same, Nov. 17, 1843.

labour into recreation by shooting them with peas. I accordingly sallied out to make a trial of this novel sport, and sending into a calf a well-directed charge, he rushed forward against a high fence, and failing to make a passage, fell backwards. Now is the time, I thought, to cure him of trespassing for ever, and so, to impress upon him its dangers and sufferings, I began belabouring him with my gun, when, lo! it snapped in two like a rotten stick. The calves have all along had the best of the contest, and I am afraid, upon a calculation of the profit and loss on both sides, they will be found to have the best of it still."<sup>1</sup>

Another vicissitude was that the new servants turned out to be rogues. At last he summoned them all to his room and said, "I have detected you in another robbery. You have been often forgiven, and the more I pardon the more you presume. It is useless therefore to expect amendment, and you must now depart this very evening." They poured out protestations and promises, to which he replied, "I have nothing to add, and nothing to retract, except that the sooner you are gone the better I shall be pleased." One ventured to say, "You have been a good master." "And you," he answered, "a bad servant, and as good masters and bad servants are not on equal terms, the sooner we part the better." The remedy was scarcely better than the disease. "There we were," he wrote, "without man, woman, or child, living in a state of true primitive simplicity. It is a life that no man should covet who does not place all his felicity in the back-ache. I tried it fully and fairly. I milked my own cow, churned my own butter, groomed my own pony, blacked my own shoes, made my own bed; in short, discharged such a variety of menial offices that I shall be completely

<sup>1</sup> To his sister Mary, Aug. 20, 1844.

qualified for a servant myself, whenever Sir Robert Peel shall deprive me of my subsistence by abolishing the Establishment. For the last fortnight we have been churning without stopping, till we are all worn out, and the butter is not come yet! Life is not worth having on such terms."<sup>1</sup>

The comic adversities which he laughingly told against himself sometimes nearly had serious results. Mrs. Elwin's sister had lent them a pony and carriage. In his devotion to literature, Whitwell Elwin liked to read poetry to his wife as they drove along at little more than a foot-pace, according to the undisturbed pleasure of their steed. One day as they were proceeding in this fashion, and he was absorbed in reading Wordsworth aloud, the animal suddenly bolted, ran to its stable in Bath at top speed, and wheeling round a sharp corner into the garden, turned over the vehicle and tipped its occupants with their volume of poetry into the road. Shortly after, the pony's temporary master, unwarned by this accident, took off its blinkers and bridle to let it feed with comfort in a green lane, while he and his wife sat on a bank, engaged in a book. The pony took advantage of its liberty to gallop away, and kicked the carriage to pieces. When Elwin went into Bath by a public conveyance he fared little better than when he drove himself. "The manner," he said, "in which I usually make the journey does not at all add to its attractions. I walk to a coach which passes at three miles' distance, and which being generally full, the coachman accommodates me, as a favour, with a seat on the top of the luggage. In this conspicuous situation I have become a known character to all the idle little boys on the road, who hoot at me as we pass."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The same, Aug. 20, and Sept. 14, 1844.

<sup>2</sup> The same, June 10, 1844.



He seemed to have a knack for falling into absurd adventures. He went one day with an architect to visit an old house, where his friend borrowed a poppy-head newel from the staircase to take home and copy. Towards dusk, as they were returning, they lost their way in a country lane. Seeing a gig coming along a cross road, Elwin ran forwards, poppy-head in hand, shouting at the top of his powerful voice, to stop the vehicle, in order to ask the road. The driver immediately lashed his horse and galloped for his life, evidently thinking his pursuer was a highwayman wielding a bludgeon.<sup>1</sup> On another occasion the laugh turned against himself. The little hamlet of Hardington, a mile or so off, had its own church, requiring to be served in turn with Hemington. One Sunday morning, when he was due there at eleven, he found on awakening that he had overslept himself so greatly that it was nearly midday. He dressed with rapidity, and ran to the church at his utmost speed. Arrived there, he found the door locked and nobody about. His first thought was that the congregation had got tired of waiting and had gone home. He then observed, what in his flurry he had not noticed before, that Nature wore the aspect of the first hours of a summer's morning. On returning home he discovered that his watch had stopped a little before midnight, and that it was still long before anyone would be astir.

At this period he was full of boyish fun, even finding amusement in practical jokes. But behind the humour there lay a solid and serious foundation. "Grave conversation,"

<sup>1</sup> In his article on Borrow's Lavengro, in 1857, Elwin alluded to this incident: "Nobody is asked to stop in the dark but he assumes that it must be for the purpose of taking his money or his life, and we have seen drivers in a gig respond to a holloa from a pedestrian who had lost his way, by furiously whipping the horse into a gallop, preferring the risk of being upset to the risk of being murdered and robbed."—*Quarterly Review*, vol. ci. p. 480.

he said, "grave studies, grave duties, form the staple of our lives, though they are certainly seasoned with as much laughter as naturally offers itself by the way, or as our poor wits can produce. We give no countenance to melancholy."<sup>1</sup> Whatever he took in hand he did thoroughly, and the important avocations of his profession were beginning to develop his talents. As a preacher he had commenced by writing his sermons; but having to give an off-hand address on some occasion at a mission chapel, a friend who heard him said, "If I could preach extempore as well as that I would never write." He took the hint, and never preached written sermons again, except occasionally for some special purpose.

The life had its anxieties and sorrows, as well as its sobrieties. Elwin's income was small, and he was unfortunate in losing what balance he had by the breaking of a bank. He and his wife were in London at the time, and learnt the event by presenting one of the notes of the bank at a shop, and having it returned over the counter as useless. This brought their holiday to an abrupt termination, for they had only just enough money to take them home. For a little while they were poor enough to feel some of the inconveniences of poverty. Then, in 1846, a lifelong sorrow overtook Mrs. Elwin. As her father, Colonel Elwin, was getting into an omnibus to go to the Horse Guards on business in connection with the pension which his wife would have at his death, he fell down dead from heart disease. His daughter's devotion to him had been great, and her grief was so acute and abiding that she never could bear to speak about him.

At Hemington two more sons were born to the Elwins—Hastings Philip in 1845, and Warwick in 1849. The

<sup>1</sup> To his sister Mary, July 31, 1844.

elder of the two was a fragile child, whose heart was affected from infancy. When he was two years old, in 1847, he was so desperately ill that the parents gave up all hope of saving him. During the crisis, while his life hung on a thread and the exertion of crying would have been fatal to him, they took it by turns to walk up and down the room with the child in their arms, day and night, without intermission, as the only means of keeping him quiet. Contrary to their expectations he recovered, but his frail health remained a constant anxiety.

These shadows, however, flitted across their horizon without darkening the general tenor of their existence. They always looked back to their half-dozen years at Hemington as the happiest time of their life. They enjoyed their house and garden, their books, their occupations, their few neighbours, and the visits of their friends and relatives. They found unfailing pleasure, too, in their little family, which was incorporated, without the aid of a nurse, into all their daily routine. The delight Whitwell Elwin had in his home was put epigrammatically in some verses, written April 25th, 1847, on having to leave his wife for a single Sunday at Clifton, where they were staying, in order to take the services at Hemington. They are worth quoting for their sentiment, though scarcely for their poetry.

I was sad in the morning at parting  
To think we had parted till night,  
And anew, on returning, when starting,  
A sadness subdued my delight.

In the morning I left behind *You*,  
Our sweet home was left behind then,  
And I needs must mourn one of the two  
Until I can blend them again.

The Hemington period produced some further articles for the Quarterly, which were chiefly valuable for the



practice they gave Elwin in writing. Lockhart had shown his acumen in at once recognising the talent of the young contributor, but it was some time before either of them discovered the line in which it could best be employed. Though both were anxious that the first experiment should be followed by another, there was a difficulty in finding a suitable subject. Nothing came of a proposal, to which Lockhart assented in 1844, for an article on the Reformation. It was not till 1846 that any more manuscripts were sent in. Then two were submitted, of which one, upon Shakespeare, was published in March, 1847. Besides reviewing some new editions of the plays, the article contained several original interpretations of obscure passages in Hamlet. It led Lockhart to suggest that Elwin should try his hand upon Beaumont and Fletcher. Having thus so nearly hit upon his true quarry in literature, it seemed strange that he should be so little aware of it as to propose in reply that he should write instead upon Science.

The fact was that, in his zeal for knowledge, he had now plunged into a course of scientific reading. As he was never able to do more than one thing at a time, this temporarily excluded literature. He once remarked that this scientific study was the hardest work he ever did. And well it may have been, for nature had not constituted him a man of science at all. He had very little mechanical dexterity or mathematical faculty, and, partly through short-sightedness, was not much of an observer of phenomena. His learning was therefore almost entirely confined to the facts which he read in books. He mastered these, however, with the thoroughness which characterised all he undertook, and impressed them indelibly on his mind. He made extensive memoranda on topics—like heat, air, water, and sound—which have some application

to common life. As the subjects themselves covered a wide range, he often astonished people by seeming to have encyclopædic information about things which he would scarcely be expected to know. A friend, in proposing his health at a dinner in 1859, remarked that, though he sometimes made inquiries as if he was seeking information, it was apparently only in order to see whether other people understood as much as he did himself. The character of his knowledge about science made it striking in conversation, but did not adapt it for the purposes of print. When, in accordance with his wish, he wrote an article on "Popular Science," for the Quarterly of March, 1849, it was a delightfully-penned résumé of some of his own discursive reading, but it was nothing more. The same may be said of a pleasant little paper on "Spectacles," in which Lockhart took an interest, and for which he made some suggestions. "I enclose Murray's cheque for a pair of spectacles," he wrote playfully, when it was published in the Review for June, 1850.

Between these two articles came a more pretentious one, of a quasi-scientific kind, in September, 1849, on the physical phenomena of Death. It originated in a request, made by Lockhart in 1847, that Elwin would review a book by Dr. Stroud, "On the Physical Cause of the Death of Christ." Having taken up the subject, he characteristically went on to investigate Death in all its bearings, and it was this extended topic that he took for his article. He prepared himself to write it by collecting extracts from a quantity of miscellaneous sources, numerous enough to fill two copy-books. While the work was thus delayed, Lockhart wrote, April 13th, 1849, "If you have any news for the editor *in articulo mortis* they will be welcome." The manuscript was sent in shortly

after, and the editor was so pleased with the first few pages that he thought it unnecessary to read more before sending it to the printer. When the whole was in type, however, he wrote, July 17th, 1849, "I have only to beg you, in going over the text, to draw your pen through whatever you perceive to be repetition or needless explanation. Readers like to draw inferences for themselves, when the job is not very straining, and men accustomed either to teaching or preaching are apt occasionally to forget this." The criticism is the more interesting because the tendency to over-explain was the chief defect to which Elwin's writing and conversation were liable. His best essays were free from it, for they were produced under conditions of speed which precluded tarrying too long upon a point. But whenever he had abundance of leisure the temptation to redundancy asserted itself. He never seemed aware of it himself. His excellent theory that all good work required time, labour, and revision, in his case aggravated this particular evil. In his anxiety to increase clearness, the oftener he revised the more he amplified. The article on Death was more carefully elaborated than anything he had written before, and this developed the fault delicately pointed out by Lockhart.

The essay was first given the bare title of "Death." Murray was somewhat startled, and doubted whether so unpleasant a subject would be acceptable to the readers of the Review. Lockhart humoured him into acquiescence by calling the paper "Fontenelle on the Signs of Death," after one of the books which it ostensibly reviewed. If the public would not relish the theme, their repugnance was not likely to be removed by the method in which the article treats it. The physical signs of approaching death are minutely described, with the sen-



sations of those who are dying—whether quietly from disease, or violently from shooting, drowning, hanging, beheading, burning and crucifixion—and then the body is followed through all the gruesome details of its subsequent decay. The paper was to have been followed up by a sequel on the workings of the mind during the process of dying. Lockhart found that the first instalment “made a very marked impression,”<sup>1</sup> and was anxious for the second. He wrote repeatedly for it, but could get no other “news from the borders of Hades”<sup>2</sup> than that the writer had “extensive materials.” These proved not extensive enough, for he believed himself to be “stuck fast for want of a French work on Suicide,” which the booksellers first told him was “not yet published,” and then was “out of print.” He was “unwilling,” he said, “to omit so interesting a branch of the subject, or to treat it without the newest and fullest information.”<sup>3</sup> His passion for exhaustive completeness remained unsatisfied, and therefore he felt unable to make a beginning. He was probably well advised, however, in not attempting the supplement, for his best matter had already been used. So, though Lockhart persisted, and wrote, in 1851, “Now be a good boy and do your death,” he admonished in vain. “I am always sorry,” he wrote, a year later, “when a number goes forth without anything of yours, and should be especially glad if you could promise me something of your best work for the next. Your ‘Sterne’ would do well, and your fulfilment of the old pledge as to ‘Death’ would put still more life into my dry bones.”<sup>4</sup> The reference to Sterne shows that it was Elwin’s own proposal to write about him. Lockhart was still so far

<sup>1</sup> Lockhart to Elwin, July 6, 1850.

<sup>2</sup> The same, July 4, 1850.

<sup>3</sup> Elwin to Murray, March 15, 1851.

<sup>4</sup> Lockhart to Elwin, Oct. 5, 1852.

from having discovered the true direction in which his contributor's pen should be employed that he preferred the subject of Death, but Elwin was now drifting for himself into the literary paths where his genius would be better employed than on retailing in literary English his collections of scientific phenomena.

While the Quarterly articles were the only serious efforts at composition that Elwin made at Hemington, he also amused himself by writing scraps of poetry. His pleasure in rhyming showed itself in the adornment of his children's picture-books with playful couplets. A few more formal attempts, all dated between 1847 and 1850, were sufficiently cared for by him to be copied into an album. They are of various kinds—religious, complimentary, and humorous. None rise above mediocrity. Considering how much he had studied the greatest poets, and how complete was his own mastery of language, it is remarkable that the verses are not better. In no instance is there a single line that can claim to show originality, and few that can rank high as poetry. Indeed, his wife's estimate, gaily put by himself in three easy-going stanzas, which are scarcely an unfair specimen of his poetical talent, was really true.

The Epic Poet ask'd to find  
Fit audience, though few,  
And I, with less ambitious mind,  
Sought praise from none but you.

But Nature still, you said, refus'd  
To give poetic fire,  
And if she did you'd wish it us'd  
To burn my jangling lyre.

Yet since to please was all my pains  
When first I took my pen,  
I'm glad to find my end it gains  
To lay it down again.

And though she expostulated, and made him write a "Recantation," he recognised that the remonstrance was only dictated by "love," which "put taste and judgment to sleep." Whatever might have been accomplished by longer practice and more strenuous exertion, there is no indication in these holiday rhymes that his poetry would ever have been on a par with his prose.







BOOTON CHURCH IN 1850.

## CHAPTER III

1850-1853

### RECTOR OF BOOTON—LITERARY WORK—HOME AND PAROCHIAL LIFE

IN 1850 the Hemington life came to an end, and accidentally the change in residence synchronised with Elwin's maturity in skill as an author.

Caleb Elwin, the Rector of Booton, died May 30th, 1849. The patron of the living was Whitwell Elwin's eldest brother, Hastings. As the intention had been throughout that Whitwell should have it when there was a vacancy, his presentation was a matter of course. In some respects it was a less attractive post than Hemington. The parish was a small one, with only 300 inhabitants. It had not even a post office, and no available railway station nearer than Norwich, twelve miles away. The church stood more than half a mile from the village, in such a desolate situation that timid and superstitious people were afraid to pass it at night. The churchyard had an ill repute for ghosts, which was perhaps a relic from the body-snatching days when the solitariness of its graveyard made it a safe field for those ugly depredators.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Evidences of the existence of body-snatching practices are sometimes still to be traced in digging new graves in the churchyard. Graves were often partially filled in with stones because these were less easily removed than earth, and the layers of stones are not infrequently struck. When the chancel was being rebuilt, about 1885, one of the workmen accidentally pierced the lid of a coffin with his pickaxe in clearing the foundations. The coffin was complete and its lining in a good state of preservation, but there were no signs of any remains having decayed inside.



There was no rectory house, nor any house in the parish in which the clergyman could live. Still it was a permanent sphere, whereas Hemington was a precarious one; its income was £300 a year in the palmy days of tithe value, which was an increase upon a curacy, not unimportant to a man with a family of children; and, though Mrs. Elwin's ties were mostly in Somersetshire, his were in Norfolk. He used to say that, if he had followed the bent of his own inclinations in his profession, he should have gone abroad as a missionary, but he did not think it right to expose a wife and children to the hardships of such a life. This being so, there was no other sphere of work that would have been so congenial to him as that of a country parish in his own part of England. Like all true Norfolk-born men, he had a great affection for his county.

Elwin's institution to the living, which took place at Norwich on Saturday morning, July 28th, 1849, was among the last of the official acts of Bishop Stanley, who died very soon afterwards. The induction was at Booton on the afternoon of the same day, and he read himself in on the following Sunday. Fearing the inclemency of an east-coast winter for his delicate son, Philip, he obtained leave of non-residence for a year, and it was the summer of 1850 before he finally moved from Somersetshire. He breakfasted with Lockhart on June 21st, as he passed through London. This was apparently their first meeting, and it confirmed the editor's good opinion of him. "He is our only valuable literary acquisition for many years past," Lockhart wrote to Murray, on June 30th, "and if he were nearer I should recommend him for, on the whole, the fittest editor of the *Quarterly Review*, so soon as the old one drops down."

For the next two years Elwin rented a house at Reep-

ham, a mile and a half from Booton Church, while he was building a parsonage on his glebe land. Though he had come back into the haunts of his boyhood, it was some twenty years since he had lived at Thurning, so that he returned partially a stranger to the neighbourhood. The first new friendship he made was with the Rev. Edward Holley, an invalid clergyman, who was rector of the adjoining parish of Hackford, and whose house was only a few minutes' walk from his own temporary residence at Reepham Moor. This was his favourite resort for many years, and it permanently contributed to his pleasure, for Mr. Holley's daughter became one of his most intimate friends, and continued to be a near neighbour and companion for the remaining fifty years of his life. Outside Mr. Holley's house Elwin did not seek much society. "I quite admit," he wrote, "that it is a duty to be sociable, but I see no sociality, to use Wordsworth's language, 'in greetings where no kindness is,' none in the ordinary 'dreary intercourse of daily life.' The laboured conversation, the little nothings of a dinner table, neither inform the intellect nor warm the heart. Friendship forms part of my idea of sociality." He said again, "In so far as happiness depends upon social pleasures, which next to religion are the highest and the most worthy, we must seek it in quiet friendships, matured in retirement—in the daily and homely intercourse of common life—and not in ballrooms, dinners, and tea-drinkings, where there is no real sympathy, and which can have no genuine charm except for frivolous people who know nothing better."<sup>1</sup> While this was always his position, in the main, he deliberately took a less adverse view of social gaiety in his later days. He learnt to discriminate the good from

<sup>1</sup> Letters, May, 1851; May 20, 1854.

the bad in society, and to recognise that benefits may be both given and received in company. Even at this early time, when he seemed to be repudiating amusements, he would throw himself with exuberant merriment into children's games, and into humorous talk with their seniors when he was in a mood for laughter. A lighter vein, too, sometimes peered through his moralisings. "I put on a cap and bells with the rest," he wrote of a Christmas party, where all the guests had been entertained with juvenile recreations. "The only defence I can offer for us all is that which is contained in a couplet composed by one of the judges in the reign of William III.:—

In Wisdom's school this maxim I have got,  
That 'tis much better to be pleased than not.

I agree with the judge, though real pleasure, if I may reason from myself, is a dish which is never served up at parties. What little honey there may be is, to my thinking, not worth the sting."<sup>1</sup> An annual fair was held in Reepham Market-place, where Mr. Holley's house was situated. In 1852, after it was over, Elwin wrote an account of it to Miss Holley, who was on a visit abroad. "We sat," he said, "to watch the antics of the clown at the same window where you and I stood moralising last year, after the fashion of Jacques in *As You Like It*. In spite of the efforts of the clown to drown thought in mirth, there was as much food as ever for sage reflection. I will send you the two best jests, or rather faint shadows of jests, that you may see how dull we grow. No. 1.—*Master of the Show to the Clown*: 'Unless you stop this impertinence I shall give you the whip.' *Clown*: 'If you do I shall certainly sell it.' No. 2.—*Clown*: 'You know my brother Billy?' *Master*: 'Yes,

<sup>1</sup> Letter, Jan. 6, 1851.



to be sure I do.' *Clown*: 'Well, at ten o'clock last night he was hale and hearty, and this morning at nine——' Here his sobs prevented him from proceeding. He began again and again, but as often as he arrived at, 'this morning at nine,' his voice was choked by the paroxysms of grief. At last it came—'and this morning at nine *he was fast asleep!*' You do not even smile at this. No! but the crowd laughed, and loudly too, from which you will draw the just inference that they were more merry than wise. On the second day of the fair, Fanny took Philip and Warwick to drink tea with your papa—the only tea-drinking she has been to these fifteen years—and, as before, we spent the evening at the window, and talked very wisely of the folly of the world, and by some strange lapse of memory never once thought of our own. We did, indeed, apologise for ourselves by saying that it was all for the sake of the children, and I sincerely hope that the excuse was true." The sequel showed that at least a deeper train of thought mingled with their amusement. "The chief attraction of the stage was a dancing girl. Some compassion for the poor creature, who I feared was being trained in the way she should *not* go, uniting with my affection for whatever comes from Bristol, which was the address on their van, induced me to send for her and her mother. On questioning the mother about Bristol, she said that it was their home till three years ago, when they lost a child while they were performing at Norwich, and that ever since they had made Norwich their headquarters, because they could not bear to turn their backs on their darling's grave. 'I should never,' she said, 'be able to rest, unless I could go and see it.' She spoke this with the utmost simplicity—indeed, there was no pretence about her—and I thought it very affecting. It proves

that not all the hardening effects of poverty, and of a coarse and wandering life, can extinguish the tenderness of some happily framed hearts. I encouraged them all I could to come and see us when they were in the neighbourhood, and hope to keep a hold on them.”<sup>1</sup>

The new scenes, friendships, and occupations of the Norfolk life did not militate against Whitwell Elwin's literary propensities. He and Lockhart made many suggestions to each other for essays from his pen, and though most of them were abortive, he used it spasmodically to good purpose. A very important element, in its bearing on his future career, was that Lockhart began to take him into partnership with himself in writing for the *Quarterly Review*. In 1850 the editor was preparing a paper on Southey, and he invoked Elwin's aid in criticising his voluminous works. “I am much obliged to you,” Lockhart wrote, November 7th, 1850, on receiving some of his observations. “Your remarks show acute study of Southey, and I shall be glad—very glad—to see what you think worth noting on his personal virtues, which were really great in the midst of so much weakness. I should also like very well to have your deliberate estimate of him as a poet. As a historian I suspect he is small, except as regards bulk. The *Book of the Church*—what is that really worth now? I have quite forgot it. The *Life of Nelson* is perhaps the only thing in this line sure of lasting—unless the *Life of Cowper*, but of that too my impression is already dim.” Lockhart's queries opened out a large field of work, and Elwin qualified himself to answer them by a thorough perusal of the books. “I have just finished reading the greater portion of Southey's writings,” he said in a letter, December 2nd, 1850, “which inclination would never have led me to do.

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, July 7, 1852.

They are of frightful bulk, and show that though he devoured much he digested little. An author must gather straw as well as corn into his barn, but he should thresh and winnow before taking it to market. This Southey never did. He chopped it all up together, and the consequence is that the bread which is made of it proves indifferent food." The result of Elwin's survey was very useful to Lockhart. "I thank you most cordially," he wrote, November 23rd, 1850. "All you have written is good. If any more thoughts or expressions occur to you, please send them as they arise. I am saved much labour by what you have done, in reference to the large poems—to re-read them bodily is a serious job—but I am delighted to find how nearly you think with me, in the general, both of the poet and the man." Lockhart used not only the materials, but also the wording, of Elwin's contributions. Sentences which may easily be detected as his, occur frequently in the article, and the whole of the last nine pages, containing a brief detailed criticism of each of Southey's principal productions, was exclusively from his hand, with the exception of a line or two at the end. When the essay appeared in the number for December, 1850, Lockhart sent Elwin a cheque for twelve guineas, "being," he said, "as I conceive, your fair share of Murray's fee."

In 1851 he wrote a short paper on some "Recent Epics" which Lockhart sent him to review. Although he did not take to the task at his first experiment, he ended by producing a capital article, felicitous in the gay banter of its caustic criticism. It was the only one of this kind that he ever wrote. Perhaps in after days he would have condemned its style himself. He once entered in a commonplace-book, as a piece of "Advice to Young Critics," "Sarcastic reviewing is the product of ill-nature and



conceit: the worst writers are usually the most abusive and the most envious." In his paper on Epics the sarcasm was, at any rate, untainted by these vices. It is free from any suspicion of malice. The paper has also the merit, in an adverse review, that, while the bombastic extracts of rhymes are amusing to read in the article, they do not provoke the slightest wish to buy the books in order to read more of the poems. A serious and masterly introduction on epic poetry in general showed how thoroughly qualified for its work was the hand which rent these disciples of the epic muse into pieces. "It would have been easy," he said, "to treble the list, but we pause because such is the monotony of nonsense that one crow can scarcely caw more like another. The claimants of the epic wreath remind us of the citizens in Don Quixote, who had a match at braying, and did it to that perfection that each took his neighbour for the original donkey."<sup>1</sup>

One of the seven poetasters who were pilloried was the Robert Montgomery whom Macaulay had taken for his unfortunate victim, in the celebrated article which he wrote, in 1830, for the Edinburgh Review, with the design of trying the effect of satire on the practice of authors and publishers in puffing worthless compositions.<sup>2</sup> Montgomery took his Quarterly castigation more meekly than he had done that of its contemporary. He somehow discovered that Elwin was the writer, wrote him a long letter—courteous to him, though abusive of Macaulay—and sent with it another volume of poems, requesting that he would "promote the usefulness of it" by a favourable review. "I should just as soon," said Elwin, "think of eating it for my dinner." When the next number came out, in July, 1852, without any reference to the work

<sup>1</sup> *Quarterly Review*, vol. xc. p. 361.

<sup>2</sup> Trevelyan's *Life of Macaulay*, vol. i. p. 200.

Montgomery wrote again, not only repeating his application for a eulogistic article, but also asking for his critic's "friendship." "I believe," wrote Elwin, "the poor man is crazy with vanity, but his good nature melts me, or at least I feel uncomfortable at his kissing the hand which struck the blow."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the incident permanently influenced him against indulging in sarcastic criticism. When Lockhart soon after exhorted him to put "a certain popular author into the mortar, and pound him very small," he "rather hesitated." "My brother Marsham," he wrote, "who is against all severity, says, now that the maximum of flogging in the army and navy is reduced to four dozen lashes, there ought to be a proportionate reduction in the lashing of authors in reviews."<sup>2</sup> Lockhart himself was, indeed, learning that this species of smart writing was going out of vogue. He once told Lord Brougham that he believed "slashing articles were no longer either much use or much approved."<sup>3</sup> "I think," wrote Southey, still earlier, in criticising the excessive severity of the Quarterly Review, "a great deal of good may be done by conciliating young writers who are going wrong, by leading them with a friendly hand into the right path, giving them all the praise they deserve, and advising or insinuating, rather than reprehending."<sup>4</sup>

"Recent Epics" was meant for the Quarterly of December, 1851, but was crowded out by the sudden influx of two articles from Croker, who had a primary claim for place in the Review. It was therefore postponed till the following March, when it appeared in company with a second paper, which had been begun directly the Epics were

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, July 7, 1852.

<sup>2</sup> The same, May 12, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Brougham to Elwin, Sept. 24, 1857.

<sup>4</sup> Southey to Coleridge, Jan. 30, 1825, *Life and Correspondence*, vol. v. p. 203.

finished. "I will tell you what it is about," he wrote to Miss Holley, October 8th, 1851, "and see if you can guess the title from the contents. It is about sermons, and church-going, and tithes, and bloomerism, and ghosts, and witches, and hunting, and love-making, and squires, and the Drummer (who do you think he is?), and manners, and Westminster Abbey, and sundry other matters too tedious to be told." This was an enigmatical description of "Sir Roger de Coverley." The "delightful article," as Lockhart called it, was Elwin's commencement of a practice, common with him afterwards, of taking a classic piece of literature, and treating it much as if it were a new book unknown to the public. This is to assume—what is no more than the truth—that most people have very little acquaintance with standard works. But the imputation would be resented if the essay did not also give those who are familiar with the original a deeper insight into its character, and therefore the method could only succeed in the hands of a learned and skilful critic. In "Sir Roger de Coverley" there is not the same dexterity in the performance as in his "Sterne" and other papers of the kind that were yet to come, but the article was an advance on anything that he had done before. "Depend on it," Lockhart wrote, at the end of 1851, "this is your hitherto masterpiece."

Lockhart's health was now breaking. He was suffering from gout and lumbago, which often confined him to his bed, and from a gouty inflammation of the eyes, which made all reading difficult and sometimes impossible. This caused him to appeal to Elwin for help with two more articles which he specially wanted to write—one on Jeffrey, the former editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, and the other on Wordsworth.

The assistance given to the Jeffrey article was so con-



siderable that Lockhart regarded it as a joint production, which he spoke of as "our job." He proposed to write the "personal and political history" himself, leaving his coadjutor to deal with Jeffrey as "a general critic." To this was immediately added a request that he would be responsible for an estimate of Jeffrey's religious opinions.<sup>1</sup> Elwin undertook these portions, but he was not very well at the time, and postponed grappling with a task which required the reading of a number of obsolete contributions to the Edinburgh Review. The consequence was that, when Lockhart wrote on May 16th, 1852, to say that, in spite of illness, he had nearly finished his share, his assistant had not begun his. "Lockhart has written for my part of Jeffrey," he wrote to a friend, on May 24th. "It is needless to add that none of it was done, and I must work this week like a slave to make amends for previous laziness." Meantime he sent Lockhart a few general observations so much to the purpose that the editor proposed to substitute some of them for his own, or at any rate "to enrich the pages with happy expressions" culled out of them.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, he deferred to his junior as much as would have been proper if their ages and positions had been reversed. "That what I have done," he wrote to Elwin, "at all pleases you is more really than I expected. It was done largely in bed, and I feared would turn out all bad; but you encourage me to revise it carefully now I am in my chair. I hope, however, more from your kind revision."<sup>3</sup> "I beg very much," he said again, "that you should go over all my pages. *Nihil tetigisti quod non ornasti*."<sup>4</sup> He felt so largely indebted to his helper that what he thought "a

<sup>1</sup> Lockhart to Elwin, April 18 and 23, 1852.

<sup>2</sup> The same, May 22, 1852.

<sup>3</sup> The same, May 27, 1852.

<sup>4</sup> The same, June 3, 1852.

fair division" of Murray's cheque—by which he appears to have meant half—seemed extravagant to Elwin. Lockhart, however, insisted on his taking it. "Pray," he wrote, in reply to Elwin's remonstrance, "let us have no more words on this very small matter. I would fain have encouragement not to be shy about asking your help again."<sup>1</sup>

Writing in part whetted Elwin's appetite for using his pen, but only in part. He found it laborious to the extent of being irksome, until he was fairly launched into the interests of a scheme. His mother, when she was eighty-six, complained that her age made her "feel lazy, which was a plague." He replied, "It is a disease from which I and millions of others have suffered all our lives, and you ought to be thankful that it has not attacked you till you are eighty-six." Thus, finding literary work a weariness, he relished all holiday interludes. When he had finished the "Jeffrey job," he wrote, "I am in that delicious interregnum between the end of one toil and the beginning of another." Lockhart did not leave him long to enjoy it. "I am quite resolved," he wrote, June 29th, 1852, "*not* to attempt the Life of Wordsworth myself. Many reasons forbid; and it would afford me all satisfaction if you would undertake that task. I am sure you would do it capitally, and any little matter that personal observation might suggest to me could easily be inlaid upon your proof. I am sorry that this course was not adopted as to Jeffrey; but that is over, and I trust your part may atone for my defects."

Increasing illness was one of Lockhart's "many reasons" for determining to withdraw from writing upon Wordsworth himself, but it was not the chief one. The article was to be founded on the newly-published Memoir of

<sup>1</sup> Lockhart to Elwin, July 9, 1852.

the poet by his nephew, then Canon of Westminster, and afterwards Bishop of Lincoln. Lockhart found it disappointing, and asked Professor Wilson, the "Christopher North" of Blackwood's Magazine, to help him with materials. Wilson, who had taken a dislike to Wordsworth, sent Lockhart a budget of hostile notes about him, and insisted that he "must put in every word or none." "Yours of yesterday," Lockhart wrote in reply, "beats all cock fighting! But you have sickened me about William Wordsworth *in toto*." "I certainly could never venture to produce such an article in the Quarterly Review. Were there no other obstacle, my kindness from the present William Wordsworth (who has always been a favourite with me) must be an insuperable one." He therefore sent back all Wilson's comments, declining to impart them to anybody else as suggestive hints.<sup>1</sup> He would be no party to an attack on Wordsworth, whom he had known and liked, and eventually resolved that the article should come from an unbiassed critic, who could judge of the man and his works on their merits. He perceived that no one could be better suited for the purpose than Elwin, of whose critical sagacity he had had ample proof. So the matter was settled. Lockhart contributed some hints and reminiscences; but, with the exception of a very few sentences here and there, none of the article was written by him. Thus Whitwell Elwin was led, by Lockhart's selection, into producing the first of the biographical essays on which his reputation as a writer mainly depends. An occasional crudeness of expression is the only respect in which it falls short of the best of his compositions.

In the Wordsworth article, printed in December, 1852,

<sup>1</sup> Lockhart to Wilson, May 9 and 13, 1851; Lang's *Life of Lockhart*, vol. ii. pp. 280-283.



Elwin boldly took up the position of a critic, and that on delicate ground. Recognising that Wordsworth's poetry had passed through two phases of imperfect criticism, "in the first of which his defects were chiefly noted, and in the second his merits," he assumed that the third era had arrived, in which a just opinion might be formed.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps his verdict was rather less favourable to Wordsworth than it would have been at either an earlier or a later period, though the difference would have been only in degree and not in substance. "Nature," he wrote, some years after, "had existed since the creation of man, but he had the genius to see it under new aspects. I think he put an element into poetry that, in originality and importance, surpasses anything that was done by Scott, Byron, or any other poet since Milton. His expressions are sometimes magical, and there are passages, and occasionally poems, in which the flow of language is delightful. But, upon the whole, his command of English is imperfect, and I think nine-tenths of his poetry suffers from this cause. His judgment again was bad. He had detected a world of meaning in objects which had been almost as dead things to his predecessors, whereby he was betrayed into magnifying much that was intrinsically little. But that spirit of life which he saw behind objects with an intensity of vision which was new to literature, was to me, as it has been to thousands of others, like an additional sense, and it is in this that I think his poetry was a grander boon to the world, as giving birth to what is in itself a world, than any element which we owe to poets who surpassed him in the literary qualities of their verse."<sup>2</sup>

In criticising Wordsworth, Elwin had his editor's support. "While Lockhart," he wrote to Professor William

<sup>1</sup> *Quarterly Review*, vol. xcii. p. 228.

<sup>2</sup> MS. note.

Knight, in 1894, "could not but do homage to Wordsworth's genius, and enter into the spirit and power of much of his poetry, he was not among the number of his uncompromising admirers." Indeed, his letters to Professor Wilson show that he had very little appreciation of either his verse or his philosophy.<sup>1</sup> The time had not come, however, when anyone could criticise Wordsworth with impunity, and the strictures in the *Quarterly* gave offence. The indignation did not disturb the equanimity of the writer. "Murray told me," he wrote, "that the article on Wordsworth had made his disciples very savage. Several of the letters came from America, and were so full of wrath that the wonder is they did not explode on their passage. It is the scream which tells that the arrow has hit. Where there is no groan there is no wound. Not that I said a word, to the best of my belief, beyond what truth required, which, however, gives more offence in this world than anything else. How it would have mortified the writers of these frantic yells if they could have heard the peals of laughter they produced in Murray's back shop."<sup>2</sup> Lockhart, who was specially qualified to judge of the subject, thought the article "very good indeed."<sup>3</sup>

Apart from the Review work Whitwell Elwin did not write anything of importance at this period. A few short papers in the *Penny Magazine*—the little educational periodical published by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge—seem to have been the only things that he put into print. He was full of literary schemes, but the majority of them never took any shape outside his mind, where, however, they rested for years as visions of what he intended to do.

<sup>1</sup> Lang's *Life of Lockhart*, vol. ii. p. 280.

<sup>2</sup> To Miss Holley, May 12, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> Lockhart to Elwin, Dec. 11, 1852

In 1851 he suggested to Murray a reprint of picked essays from the Quarterly, for his Library of Cheap Literature. It was to have an introduction giving "a history of Quarterly Reviews, and that of *the* Quarterly in particular," and was to be "accompanied with notices of the writers, criticisms on the articles, an occasional summary of the sentiments of contemporary journals, and any species of gossip that was worthy to be preserved."<sup>1</sup> A very little reflection must have led to the conclusion that the undertaking would be colossal, without any commensurable benefit. A modified scheme for writing an account of the origin and growth of the Quarterly Review, without extraneous matter, simmered on for a few years in conversations and letters between him and the publisher.

Both Whitwell Elwin and his eldest brother Hastings were Shakespeare students. The latter had annotated some of the plays, besides writing essays on their structure. Murray wanted to bring out a Railway edition of the dramatist, and it was suggested that the two brothers should work at it in partnership. Hastings Elwin, however, after printing a section of his commentary for private circulation, relapsed into private studies without a view to publication. Whitwell then proposed to edit a play or two himself, as specimens for Murray's approval, and he made a start upon Macbeth. Lockhart, without knowing this, proposed him to Murray, in 1853, as a suitable person to be entrusted with preparing another contemplated edition of Shakespeare. More pressing engagements hindered his doing much at the time, but he never quite lost sight of the wish to edit a Shakespeare. He had an intimate critical knowledge of the plays, often quoted from them, and enjoyed

<sup>1</sup> Elwin to Murray, June 23, 1851.



expounding them. But like much else of his literary knowledge, his Shakespearian stores were chiefly committed to paper in mere detached fragments, written to younger students who wanted assistance in their reading.

Two other publications, which equally remained unaccomplished, were mooted at this period—an edition of the Works of Addison, with a new Life, for Murray's British Classics, and "The Lives of the Poets from Chaucer to Wordsworth." The idea assumed sufficiently definite shape for both to be put on Murray's lists of books "in preparation." The publisher at first offered Elwin £1,000 for the copyright of the two undertakings, though a few days after there was substituted an agreement to divide the profits.<sup>1</sup> Addison had no doubt been suggested by the success of the Sir Roger de Coverley paper in the Quarterly Review. The other project was, for many years afterwards, almost the dream of his life. Much was expected from it by his friends. Lockhart once said to George Boyle, afterwards Dean of Salisbury, "No one but myself knows what a treasure the world will have if Elwin lives to bring out his Lives of English Poets."<sup>2</sup> His critical biographies in the Quarterly show how brilliantly he would have executed it, if the conditions which made him produce those terse and graphic essays could have been equally secured for a book.

His first design was to complete Johnson's Lives of the Poets by writing memoirs of all those who flourished before or after the period which Johnson had covered. The whole series would then give a complete history of English poetry. Johnson's work was to be brought up to date by editorial notes and supplements. "He was

<sup>1</sup> Murray to Elwin, July 2, 1853; Elwin to Murray, July 11, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> Dean Boyle to W. Elwin, Dec. 25, 1900.

a great genius," wrote Elwin, "and the Lives are the best fruits of that genius. But he disdained research; he has told some things inaccurately, and many not at all. In the critical part, admirable and original as he shows himself, his taste was not catholic. He wrote, too, chiefly from the recollection of former reading, and several works of all his authors are barely noticed. Upon the whole there is great room for many interesting comments."<sup>1</sup> Peter Cunningham had been already engaged by Murray to edit Johnson's Lives. It was therefore proposed that the two schemes should be combined into one, and that the editors should work throughout in conjunction with each other. Elwin thought that Cunningham would write the notes to Johnson's Lives, and that the longer dissertations should be contributed by himself—"in short," he said, "*he* might take the feet, and leave *me* the tails." Neither the plan of attempting to unite fresh biographies in a series with Johnson's, nor the method of carrying it out by joint authorship, was good, and both were soon abandoned. Peter Cunningham was left to deal with Johnson alone, and Whitwell Elwin to write his own set of Lives. He began on Byron in 1853, but did not proceed far with it; and though he afterwards chose one or two of his subjects for essays in the Quarterly with a view to using them in the work, nothing came of the design. Nevertheless the project was constantly recurring to his mind. As late as 1871 he revived it in the less extensive form of "Lives of the most eminent Poets from the beginning of the eighteenth century," leaving out, as he wrote to Murray, "the fry." Even this did not advance beyond drawing up a list of names of twenty versifiers whom he thought worthy of a place among the "most eminent."

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, 1853.

The motive for selecting Byron as the poet on whom he would begin was simply that he had been engaged on an edition of Byron's Poems during 1851 and 1852. The editorial duties consisted of writing short prefaces and notes to the pieces, and in addition he corrected several current misprints, some of which had been neglected by Byron himself. It was not a task that he took much pleasure in, for he disliked Byron's character, and felt some compunction at having undertaken it. The work was published by Murray in eight cheap volumes in 1852, without the name of the editor, and was reprinted in 1854, as one of his British Classics, with a few trifling revisions of the notes. Elwin rarely alluded to his part in it, and was once annoyed with Peter Cunningham for revealing it. In 1853 Murray published a volume of selections from Byron's poetry and prose, under the title of "Beauties of Byron: By a Clergyman." This, which was only a piece of scissors work, but one which required taste and tact, was also done by Elwin. He was therefore well versed in the subject. The short fragment of Byron's Life that he commenced was written in a happy strain, which augured well for the rest, had his energies not been diverted into a different course.

Simultaneously with his literary avocations during his first three years in Norfolk, Elwin was busy in the pastoral work of his parish. He had to deal with a rough and undisciplined population, which had suffered from the want of a resident clergyman for many generations. While still at Reepham Moor he opened a night-school for the lads, who made such a disturbance on their way home that the neighbours complained, and he was obliged to give it up. Ignorant superstitions abounded. "An old man," he wrote, "who is ill with a dropsy brought on by drunkenness, is in a most self-complacent state on the



strength of a dream vouchsafed him twenty years ago. Here it is—"I thought I was walking in a field early in the morning when Moses came to me, and bid me turn and behold my Saviour. I looked round and saw a Man standing on the hedge in a white duffle coat, with a hat on his head, and no features. I woke directly afterwards, and never was so happy in my life." He takes this grovelling phantom for a visitation from heaven. It has been his comfort through a long course of desperate wickedness, and it is his main trust in the prospect of a speedy death, nor can he be reasoned out of his wild delusion. A superannuated brewer is equally happy on the ground that he 'never drunk his beer till he had earned it, and mostly took it mild.' Until you come into close conversation with these poor creatures you never guess how thick is the darkness which shrouds their minds."<sup>1</sup> In later life Elwin took much pleasure in contrasting the mental condition of his people, as they had then become, with what it was when he first went amongst them.

He anticipated much from establishing himself in his new rectory house at Booton. This was built out of his own and his wife's capital, as a free gift to the benefice. It was a handsome house in the Elizabethan style, the only fault of which was the common one of being out of proportion to the income of the living. He was not then, as he became afterwards, his own architect, but he took great interest in the work. He gained from it his first experience of the dilatoriness of builders' men. "My house gets on," he wrote, "as the Tower of Babel got on when the workmen were dispersed. Not but that our carpenters are always planing and sawing, only nothing seems to come of it." "I am driven to the conclusion that the men make it a shop in which to do work for

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, 1852.



BOOTON RECTORY.





somebody else, so great is the activity, and so small the progress."<sup>1</sup> The family moved in early in 1853, when it was still uncompleted and damp, and the children got an attack of bronchitis. However, the builders were ousted in March, though the rooms were still unpainted and unpapered, and so remained for nearly fifty years after. The bareness of the walls, to which the family became accustomed, could not fail to attract the notice of guests. "The unfinished house: the windows unprotected by blinds: his utter unconsciousness of it," were John Forster's exclamations in his diary, when he visited Booton in 1854. There was little change when, still later, a clergyman came to preach a sermon for some charity. "I see," he said to Mrs. Elwin, as he looked round the drawing-room, "you have lately moved." "Yes," she replied, "we have only been here twelve years."

As soon as the rectory was completed, the same tedious process had to be begun over the grounds. A landscape gardener was called in, but he proved a failure, and when eighteen months had elapsed there was still nothing but the ordinary field in which the house had been built, cut up into a quagmire by carts. A visitor who called in a carriage sent in her footman, and then her coachman, to explore the way, and they both reported that it was impracticable. "The field," Elwin wrote, as winter came on, "is fifty times more impassable than ever, and even a waggon, if it attempted to enter, would be upset. We want coals, and can't tell how to get them up to the house unless we lay down planks and barrow them." A new designer was engaged, for whose use ten men and two carts and horses were brought on the scene. "After sticking in a few stakes, and digging a number of holes,—in short, putting everything into confusion and nothing into

<sup>1</sup> The same, June 12 and July 7, 1852.

order,—he was summoned back to town.” At last the Rector took it in hand himself. “I am trying,” he wrote, November 25, 1854, “to dig myself out of the dilemma. We make all sorts of mistakes, and find ourselves suddenly in the most unlooked-for difficulties, the majority of which exist at this moment.” “Our garden will have this distinction at least, that it will be unlike any other garden that was ever seen.”<sup>1</sup> It was still another year before it was got into shape and planted. Among the men who worked on it were some old soldiers. One had served under Sir Charles Napier in India, and from him he got the reminiscence which he afterwards used in his article on Sir Charles in the *Quarterly*, that at the battle of Meanee the general had ridden up and down the line maintaining the spirit of the troops by crying incessantly, “Keep it up, my boys, keep it up!”<sup>2</sup> Others were invalids from the Crimea who were in Sir George Brown’s division at the Alma. They told him that the terrible part of the battle was the crossing of the river: after that the scaling of the heights was a trifle.

The Elwins’ fourth son was born on April 1, 1853, the anniversary of his eldest brother’s birthday. “He is rather more ugly than new-born babies generally are,” the father wrote, “which is just the same as to say that he is rather uglier than anything else in the world. Philip could not even recognise that he was human, but asked ‘what *its* name was, for he had never seen that sort of *animal* before.’ The housemaid declared that it was a ‘little beauty,’ upon which our children remarked that they should never believe a word she said again. It looks auspicious to have two children born on the 1st of April. But, as somebody exclaims in Shakespeare, ‘I defy

<sup>1</sup> Letters, Nov. and Dec., 1854.

<sup>2</sup> *Quarterly Review*, vol. civ. p. 484.

auguries.' If it was really the case that fools came into the world on the first of April, there would be few births on any other day. I wished for a girl, but Providence, who chooses for us, is happily wiser than our wishes. Hyde—Lord Chief Justice of England in the reign of Charles II.—was one of *twelve* sons. I knew a clergyman in Somersetshire who had nine children, all boys; and there were present on the field of Edge Hill, fighting for Charles I., seven Byrons—brothers—which sounds rather grand. Yet, in spite of these precedents, domestic and historic, and in spite of the Duke's assertion that 'women are *so* aggravating,' I could have put up patiently with that plague, an obstinate daughter. I begin to be like the little old woman who lived in a shoe,—I have so many children I don't know what to do. I am rich in nothing but children, and I am taking the precaution of setting an enormous quantity of potatoes. It sounds very fine, to give to the world; as Johnson has put it, 'one true Briton more,' but then I have to feed the 'true Briton,' and to clothe him, and to educate him, and to establish him in life—all of which, surely, is extremely hard. It was not a 'Briton' I wanted, but a British female. However, the delightful little rascal cannot help being a boy, and therefore I have the justice to love him as much as if he had been a worthless, ne'er-do-well girl. . . . Still I should have liked my children mixed—just one brown ginger-bread along with the white." The parents could not settle readily what to call the boy. "The women," said the father, still hankering after the wished-for daughter, "have got all the pretty names."<sup>1</sup> They ended by christening him Edward Fentone, after a previous Rector of Booton, whose brass in the church recorded that, when he died in 1610, he had been "preacher of the Worde"

<sup>1</sup> Letters, April, 1853.



there for forty-six years, a period which Elwin was to exceed himself.

Shortly after the birth of this child the whole family went to Bath to pay a last visit to Mrs. Elwin's aged mother. She had rallied from an illness, after the medical attendant had announced that she was certainly dying. When she was supposed to be sinking, in 1852, Whitwell Elwin had written to a friend, "Her advanced years, her eminent piety, her anxious disposition, her intense longing to depart, all help us to say, 'God's Will be done.' Yet neither the consolations of religion, nor the conclusions of reason, can prevent the sorrow of affection. My own share in the trial is something, for she was one of the few persons whom I ever really loved. To my wife the effect is what might be expected, when the most affectionate of daughters is left to mourn the most doating of mothers."<sup>1</sup> The respite was not for very long. She reached her desired goal before 1853 was out.

The buoyant spring of Elwin's spirits was shown by the easy way in which he passed and repassed from grave to gay in his conversation and letters, brightening both with a racy flow of unpremeditated humour, touched with the lightest of hands. He was pleasantly occupied, but with sufficient leisure to study any books he fancied. "I am reading Pope's Homer," he wrote, March 19, 1853, "which is no more like Homer than a hoary oak with its seamed bark and nodosities is like the same tree when planed and polished. But the tree is beautiful in both states, and so it is with the English Homer and the Greek. I study, too, by snatches, Carpenter's bulky book on Physiology." For the moment he reposed from his own literary efforts. "I have been sadly idle," he added to the same correspondent a few days after. "I have an immense respect

<sup>1</sup> March 6, 1852.

for that despised virtue—industry. Talent, without it, may have gleams of success, but makes no steady progress, and mediocrity, with it, achieves unexpected triumphs. I am resolved I will become a hard-working man, and shall begin next Monday. Most of my undertakings have been at a standstill, but when Monday arrives, and brings industry in its train, then we shall jog on apace, apace.” It may be very much questioned whether the pace would have mended greatly, if pressure from outside had not harnessed him, in spite of himself, to literary work.

Before entering upon this—the more public part of his career—it will be well to complete the picture of his domestic and parochial life.

Much greater simplicity reigned in the middle of the nineteenth century than at its close, and all Elwin’s tastes and habits were simple and frugal even for those times. He never kept a carriage, or gave dinner-parties, or roved about to seek recreation. The quiet routine of ordinary occupations was only broken in upon occasionally by some passing guest.

His day began later than, as a rule, was customary. He often observed that early-risers are a great deal too proud of their achievement, for the question should be, not what o’clock a man gets up, but what he does when he is up, and whether he spends too much of his life in sleep or not. He would adduce Dr. Johnson as an instance of a man who was late in his habits, and who yet did a vast amount of work. Though he did not get up early, Elwin was not a long sleeper or a late waker. He used to read in bed in the morning, and for this purpose generally took up a pile of books overnight. He was not even deterred by large folios, which he was skilled in balancing before him as he lay in a recumbent posture. At about half-past

eight the newspaper was taken up to him, and it depended on the amount of news in it whether or not he was punctual in coming downstairs. Heavy breakfasts had not yet come into fashion anywhere, and there was nothing uncommon in the plain fare of bread and butter, which formed the usual repast at Booton Rectory. The children took part in this, as they did in all the meals, and when they had left the table, their father liked to sit on for some while talking to his wife, who occupied the time with knitting.

The study was a little room entirely lined with bookshelves, and nearly filled by a large deal table. Here Elwin sat through most of the forenoon, with his chair close into the fireplace, reading or writing at a desk embedded in a disordered mass of books, letters, and papers. At two Mrs. Elwin brought in her needlework, and sat by the window while he read to her whatever he had been writing, or some passage out of a book. Dinner was a wholesome meal of two courses at a quarter-past two. After this he liked, if he could, to rest conversing till four, when he went out and visited in the parish, generally prolonging his walk to Mr. Holley's house at Hackford. After a plain tea and slight supper, he generally spent the latter part of the evening in reading to himself, or aloud to his wife, till after midnight.

The only point in which the life differed particularly from that of most country parsonages of the time was in the greater degree of its quiet seclusion, and in the extent to which the boys were admitted to a share in the domestic habits of their parents. The mother never employed a nurse for her children, all of whom she brought up entirely by herself. Full of cultured tastes and interests, she would have shone in social surroundings, if her lot had been cast among them, and she would have had a keen



enjoyment in sights and travel, if she had had the opportunity to indulge in them ; but she elected instead to dedicate herself to the duties of her home, where she spent her many years in living for the good of those around her. Forster described her, in 1854, as "still pretty, a homely good model of an English mother,—comely, earnest, unaffected, always doing something—putting her children to bed. Nothing disturbs her. A perfect lady." She was a remarkable woman, and made a striking impression on all those who were privileged to know her.

Few things in English villages have undergone a greater change in the last fifty years than the position and duties of its parish priests. Norfolk, at the period when Elwin became Rector of Booton, was behind even other counties in matters of pastoral care. Dissent was rife. The knowledge of churchmanship was slender. Services were in most places confined to the Sundays ; churches were everywhere kept locked ; they were usually in bad repair, were ill-kept and uncared for, and there was nothing bright or attractive in their religious observances. Booton was no exception. Before Whitwell Elwin went there, it had been served by a curate, who lived in a neighbouring parish. Caleb Elwin, the previous rector, being a pluralist with five livings and a domestic chaplaincy, had had very little to do with its ministrations. His signature only occurred once in the parochial registers during his incumbency. A still earlier Rector of Booton had been known to arrive at the church, for an occasional office on a weekday, equipped in top-boots and hunting costume. The church itself and its services were both dreary in the extreme. The nave was partly fitted with high square pews, occupied, in order of precedence, by the farmers of the parish. Below these came open benches for the poor, without any provision for kneeling. The school-children

were ranged on common forms, set longitudinally down the centre, and as the clergyman and chief inhabitants passed to their places they rose and made a bob or salute. The parson and clerk were located in a mean reading pew, which led into a better Jacobean pulpit, completing the "three-decker." There was no music of any kind, and between the prayers and the sermon there was a pause while the officiant, attended by the clerk, proceeded to a chest in the chancel, in order to exchange his surplice for a preacher's gown.

Elwin had hoped that when he got into his house close to the church, he would be able to have daily services, in which at least the family could join. Household duties seemed at the time to be incompatible with this, and it was not till several years after that he was able to carry out the intention. At first he made little change in the character of the worship, partly because he lacked the means, partly because it was of so prevalent a type that there seemed less occasion for alteration than would be felt necessary in these days of increased Church privileges. He retained also enough of the evangelical sentiments to which he had been accustomed in earlier life to make him averse to anything like ornate ceremonial. Some kinds of Church music were even against his principles. "I should never," he said, in 1854, "be reconciled to the intoning of *prayers*. Singing is the language of thanksgiving, but not of contrition and self-abasement." He was an excellent reader, and after the fashion of the day delivered the service with considerable emphasis, and preached in the loudest tones. Once a quarter only there was a "Sacrament Sunday," and it was many years before he increased its frequency, or altered the quaint ritual of the arrangements. The clerk used to bring the requisites for the Celebration in a wicker basket, which was pushed

under the altar, where it was plainly visible below the big white cloth that replaced the musty red covering of other times. With the sacred vessels there were placed on the altar an ordinary loaf of bread and a black bottle of wine, covered over with a napkin. As the main part of the congregation retired, the rector removed this covering, took a corkscrew and opened the bottle, and prepared the elements in sight of the communicants. These details are worth recording simply as a description of bygone customs and modes of thought. The lack of ceremonial implied no irreverence or slovenliness. It belonged to a state of feeling,—now almost entirely past, but then common among a large class of pious persons—that since religion does not consist in forms, it is better altogether without them.

Elwin's opinions were deeply imbued with religion. "I feel," he wrote in 1854, "an increasing sense of the worthlessness of everything which does not begin and end in God." His views centred round the Bible, of which he had always been a devout and diligent student. After giving a friend some advice about reading, he wrote, in 1850, "The principal matter, after all, is to love and ponder that Book of books, which outweighs in value the united libraries of the world. 'Is not the gleanings of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abi-ezer?'" His ideal of preaching was Bible exposition. His applications of its lessons to practical life were generally rather moral than dogmatic, except as regards personal faith in a Creator and Redeemer. He regarded forms in theology, like forms in worship, as comparatively immaterial, if the heart was fixed on divine things. Somewhat repelled by the species of artificial piety with which he had been familiar in Somersetshire, and with a mind set against the Oxford Movement and its patristic authorities, he naturally



turned for his own studies to the writings of the period of which he was fondest in literature. Thus the religious but undogmatic and rather dreary divinity of the eighteenth century became his model for a time, and his standard theological reading for always. He was even at one period to some extent an admirer of the unorthodox Dr. Samuel Clarke, though he was careful to note the danger of his semi-Arian opinions. Baxter was an "immense favourite" with him. He valued Jeremy Taylor for his eloquent devotion, and often quoted him. Barrow he also liked in spite of his heaviness, and Tillotson he greatly admired as a preacher. "A more elevated strain of piety," he wrote in 1856, "expressed in more simple and sincere language, is nowhere to be found than in the sermons of Tillotson. They read like the writings of an apostle. But what makes particular people speak against him is that they judge by phrases and not by ideas. They are familiar with a certain set of expressions which they and their party are accustomed to employ, and they will not allow anything to be genuine Christianity which is conveyed in a different form of words. Nobody holds the doctrine of Redemption more fully than Tillotson, nobody makes the efforts of man more entirely dependent upon the grace of God, nobody demands greater holiness of life; but he puts these truths into elegant and forcible English (though there is no affected straining after finished composition), and these people imagine that his theology is worse than theirs because his language is better. Every sect has its own phraseology, and it is by the garb and not by the man that they judge. I assure you it does one's heart good to read Tillotson's elevated yet simple exhortations. They give you a higher idea than ever of your duty, and inflame you with a desire to practise it. They make religion seem the loveliest and pleasantest thing in the

world, and carry your thoughts from earth to heaven.”<sup>1</sup> No words could better state his own standpoint. He disliked extremes, and yet, though liberal in his views, he was never what was called a broad churchman. The general result was that he stood aloof from party ties. His own deep faith was built on a profound belief in the Being and Providence of God, and in the abundance of the revelation of Holy Scripture. With some variations of opinion, in one direction or another, as life went on, this solid basis always remained the same. His position may perhaps be best expressed by saying that he was more of a divine than a theologian, and this is a description of him to which he would himself at any time have readily assented as true.

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, June 25, 1856.

## CHAPTER IV

1853-1854

### DEPUTY-EDITORSHIP—CROKER AND THE QUARTERLY REVIEW—LOCKHART

IN a letter written in 1853, when he was thirty-seven, Whitwell Elwin remarked, "Gray, the poet, declared he would have a medal struck in his own honour, with one side blank, and on the other *Nihilissimo*."<sup>1</sup> He quoted this because he modestly felt that his own pursuits, abilities, and wishes contained nothing worthy of record. He did not aspire to celebrity. But he was beginning to get into the society of men who compelled him to use his talents. He was up in London in May, 1853, and "went to a good many places, and saw a good many people." He only partly cared for it. "When I got between the Booton hedgerows," he wrote, on his return, "they were as grateful to my eyes as if they had been the hedgerows of the Garden of Eden. . . . Fragments of the talk were interesting and amusing, but on the whole it is a wearisome, unprofitable business." Lockhart concurred in his view of London parties. "One cannot be above ground here," he said, "and wholly escape these things, which are to me wormwood at once and poison."<sup>2</sup> Lock-

<sup>1</sup> "I had struck a medal upon myself: the device is thus—O—and the motto: *Nihilissimo*, which I take in the most concise manner to contain a full account of my person, sentiments, occupations, and late glorious successes."—Gray to West, July, 31, 1740; *Works*, vol. ii. p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> Lockhart to Elwin, May, 1853.



hart thought that they hindered the recovery of his health. "There is no fear," wrote Elwin, some months later, when he was in town, "that I should forsake Booton for London. I never cling so fondly as when here, to the peaceful pursuits of home, and to the friendships which are the joy of my life. The interchange that goes on in society here is almost entirely of the head,—there is little or nothing of the heart. Consequently, though it may amuse for a time, it yields no permanent pleasure,—at least not to me."

Among the notables whom he had met was Borrow, whose *Lavengro* and *Romany Rye* he afterwards reviewed in 1857, under the title of "*Roving Life in England.*" Their interview was characteristic of both. Borrow was just then very sore with his slashing critics, and on someone mentioning that Elwin was a "*quartering* reviewer,"<sup>1</sup> he said, "Sir, I wish you a better employment." Then, hastily changing the subject, he called out, "What party are *you* in the Church,—Tractarian, Moderate, or Evangelical? I am happy to say *I* am the old *High.*" "I am happy to say *I* am *not*," was Elwin's emphatic reply. Borrow boasted of his proficiency in the Norfolk dialect, which he endeavoured to speak as broadly as possible. "I told him," said Elwin, "that he had not cultivated it with his usual success." As the conversation proceeded it became less disputatious, and the two ended by becoming so cordial that they promised to visit each other. Borrow fulfilled his promise in the following October, when he went to Booton, and was "full of anecdote and reminiscence," and delighted the rectory children by singing

<sup>1</sup> "The despotism of editors is not so arbitrary as it used to be. My memory does not go back to the fear in which the *Quarterly*, 'so savage and slaughteringly,' used to be held; one would have supposed it took its name from its quartering as well as executing its victims."—JAMES PAYN'S *Gleams of Memory*, p. 79.

them songs in the gipsy tongue. Elwin during this visit urged him to try his hand at an article for the Review. "Never," he said. "I have made a resolution never to have anything to do with such a blackguard trade."<sup>1</sup>

Elwin's visit to London had literary as well as social results. "Murray," he said, "has given me more orders for the articles of my trade than I can execute in a lifetime." They were, however, "scissors and paste" jobs, and none of them were carried out. He had also talked much with Lockhart about the Review. Lockhart had already begun to use him as his deputy. Just before the previous Christmas he had been obliged to go suddenly abroad, and had written to Elwin before starting, to say that he should probably tell the printers to send him anything that was not finally corrected for the coming number, that he might "do the needful—in short, act as Mr. Editor for the nonce."<sup>2</sup> Lockhart now sent him the proof of a long paper, asking him if he would go over it "very sharply," "enacting editor" with regard to it.<sup>3</sup> From sixty pages Elwin cut it down to twenty, of which more than half were his own. Then, "after all the pulling to pieces and the putting together again, the paring and patching," he came to the conclusion that it was still worthless and must be cancelled. Lockhart accepted his verdict, conveying it to the writer of the article in a "civil edition" of the critic's letter. "*Tantæ molis est*," he said, "to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear."<sup>4</sup>

In May, 1853, the postal authorities granted Booton a separate post office of its own. The epistles of his three hundred rustics, Whitwell Elwin said, averaged about two a week. The correspondence which warranted the step was entirely his own, and that mainly caused by the

<sup>1</sup> Elwin to Murray, Oct. 2, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> Lockhart to Elwin, Dec. 22, 1852.

<sup>3</sup> The same, May 21, 1853.

<sup>4</sup> The same, May 24, 1853.

Quarterly Review. So much was Lockhart disposed to use his assistance that Murray began to think seriously of the proposal that Elwin should be regarded as a possible successor to the management of the Review, when a change should become inevitable. Lockhart continued to encourage the idea, only playfully objecting that a clerical editor would not be able to "go on the ground" to fight duels.<sup>1</sup> Murray apparently felt that his profession might somehow stand in the way, and sounded him on the subject with deprecatory caution. Elwin replied, "I quite agree with you that editing a journal of any kind is not a clerical function, but I shall be happy if I can render such help as will a little lighten Lockhart's load, and facilitate his trip abroad. As one may garden without being a gardener, so one may edit temporarily without being an editor. It interferes with none of my functions, and is therefore no tax."<sup>2</sup>

The occasion for such temporary editing was not long deferred. The number for June, 1853, was the last that Lockhart was able to supervise. At a consultation, on July 5, his physicians, Sir Benjamin Brodie and Dr. Fergusson, came to a conclusion which coincided with Lockhart's own consciousness, that it was impossible for him "to grapple with the next number, unless at the imminent risk of both physical and mental sanity."<sup>3</sup>

On former occasions, when Gifford or Lockhart had been ill or away, Croker had taken their place.<sup>4</sup> Age and health forbade this now, even if it had been desirable for the interests of the Review. Moreover, from the tone of a letter of Murray's to Croker,<sup>5</sup> it is evident that he

<sup>1</sup> Lang's *Life of Lockhart*, vol. ii. p. 337.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, May 25, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> Lockhart to Murray, July 5, 1853.

<sup>4</sup> Smiles's *Memoir of Murray*, vol. ii. pp. 57, 505.

<sup>5</sup> Aug. 19, 1853.



realised the unlikelihood that Lockhart would ever return to his post. Lockhart himself did not expect to resume his function. He noted, on July 16, when the summer number was off his hands, "I suppose my last number of the Quarterly Review."<sup>1</sup> Practically, therefore, a new editor had to be chosen. Adolphus, the son of the historian, was first proposed by Murray, and the selection met with the concurrence of both Lockhart and Croker, but he was not available at once, and the emergency demanded "immediate measures."<sup>2</sup> Thereupon Murray definitely suggested Elwin. "Elwin," Lockhart replied, "will do more than anyone else I can think of as *possible*. Assuredly he will do all he can, and I feel not less sure that he will do it with the feelings and in the manner of a gentleman. At least as to mere literary and historical matters I have confidence in his resources, and I give him credit for sense and modesty to ask assistance where his acquisitions are less considerable."<sup>3</sup> Murray wrote off by the same day's post to ask him to take up the reins. Elwin could not but be pleased at the compliment, and the office was one in many respects to his taste; but he had not coveted it, and would have preferred, on the whole, to have escaped from it. It was not, however, his wont to dwell on counter arguments after he had made up his mind on a course of action, and he therefore made no allusion to his demur when he answered Murray's letter. "I have no hesitation," he said, "in accepting your very kind offer to conduct the Quarterly Review during Lockhart's furlough. It is needless to say that I am greatly flattered by Lockhart's willingness to have me for his *locum tenens*, and assuredly I shall do my utmost to

<sup>1</sup> Lang's *Life of Lockhart*, vol. ii. p. 366.

<sup>2</sup> Murray to Lockhart, July, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> Lockhart to Murray, July 27, 1853.

justify his approval."<sup>1</sup> A few days after he went up to London to receive Lockhart's own instructions. "I am much contented with my conversation with Elwin to-day," Lockhart wrote to Murray, after the meeting, "and am quite satisfied that of all at your choice he was the best you could have fixed on."<sup>2</sup>

It was not altogether with a light heart that Elwin entered on his function. "You know," he wrote to a friend, "how resolute I have been to decline it, but the impossibility of finding anyone who could fill the office has shaken my resolution. I have still a strong hope that Lockhart may recover his health, and return to his duties, and at any rate I have only promised to make a trial of the task. The money, the power, and the sort of distinction it confers in literary society, have none of them much charm for me, and it is with great misgiving that I commit myself thus far. Of this I am sure, that I shall lay down my sceptre with fifty times the pleasure that I take it up."<sup>3</sup> The task of the *locum tenens* was not, indeed, an easy one. The Review had deteriorated during Lockhart's illness, and Murray told Croker it had arrived at "a crisis in its existence."<sup>4</sup> It had become dull, and with the dulness the sale had dwindled. "In all my experience of Lockhart as an editor," Whitwell Elwin wrote, "he appeared a consummate master of his craft—with the single exception that he seemed too ready to patronise Dr. Dryasdusts. It is the last leaning I should have expected from so vivacious a mind."<sup>5</sup> "I could never observe," he wrote again, "in my interviews with him that his mental powers had in the least degenerated, but

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, July 28, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> Lockhart to Murray, Aug. 9, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> To Miss Holley, July 28, 1853.

<sup>4</sup> Murray to Croker, Aug. 19, 1853.

<sup>5</sup> To Murray, Aug. 7, 1853.

certainly, from some cause or other, his judgment about articles had become latterly quite perverted. . . . When J. G. L. returns with his spirits high and his intellect elastic, he will himself be astonished that he should ever have encouraged such noodles."<sup>1</sup> Elwin, therefore, had to set himself "to shake off the mediocrity which had been hanging on the skirts of the Review, and dragging it down,"<sup>2</sup> and this without any of the prestige which had attached to Lockhart's name, and without the full authority belonging to a permanent head.

The editorial chair, also, was not free from personal embarrassments. When Lockhart's health broke down he had described himself, as Elwin used to relate, in the doggrel lines—

Overworked, overworried,  
Over-Croker'd, over-Murray'd.<sup>3</sup>

The position which Croker had acquired in relation to the Review was a difficult one to deal with. The elder John Murray, who had founded the Quarterly, had engaged him to write two articles for every number, at a fixed salary of £150 a quarter for an average of four sheets (sixty-four pages) of matter.<sup>4</sup> His services to the Review had been immense, but they had not been unalloyed, and now belonged somewhat to the past. Many of his opinions had grown extravagant, the expression of them more so; his statements and quotations

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Sept. 6, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Oct. 2, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> Lockhart appears to have adopted the couplet from an earlier version which must have referred to Gifford. An incomplete and almost illegible copy of this exists in the handwriting of the third John Murray, in the form—

Overwearied, overworried,  
Over-Crokered, over-Murrayed,  
Over-Southeyd [?], over-Waltered,  
Fain I would that I were altered.

The "over-Waltered" refers, of course, to Sir Walter Scott.

<sup>4</sup> Smiles's *Memoir of Murray*, vol. ii. p. 430.



had, with increasing years, become unreliable, and the Review was at any rate overweighted by the undue proportion of the products of a single brain. On one occasion, even as far back as 1825, when there seemed a possibility of his seceding from the Quarterly, Lockhart wrote to the publisher, "With reverence be it spoken, even this does not seem to me a matter of very great moment. On the contrary, I believe that his papers in the Review have (with few exceptions) done the work a great deal more harm than good. I cannot express what I feel; but there was always the bitterness of Gifford without his dignity, and the bigotry of Southey without his *bonne-foi*."<sup>1</sup> When Murray's son succeeded to the publishing business in 1843, he soon became aware that Croker's personality sometimes lay heavily on the Review, but felt unwilling to alter his father's agreement with him. The difficulty was one that did not subside with time. "John Murray is sick of Croker," wrote Lockhart to his daughter, in 1851, "and Croker is now in a most impracticable state—exceedingly jealous that he is supposed to be falling off in his mental vigour, which I see no signs of, though his bodily condition is certainly alarming."<sup>2</sup> Lockhart's complaint that he was "over-Croker'd" was literally true, for Croker, though loyal to the editor, would get his own way if he could, by putting on a wilful and dictatorial air, which sometimes concealed the generosity of his nature. When Lockhart was pressing Elwin to become his deputy, the latter naturally raised certain objections. Among these was the authority of Croker. Elwin said he could not insert articles such as some with which Croker was credited;

<sup>1</sup> Smiles's *Memoir of Murray*, vol. ii. p. 225.

<sup>2</sup> To Mrs. Hope-Scott, Feb. 7, 1851; Lang's *Life of Lockhart*, vol. ii. p. 345.

yet, in their respective positions, he would be unable to reject them. Lockhart replied, "You will be able to deal with him far better than I could. He and I for years have, as editor and contributor, been in intimate relations. You, who have had no previous connection with him, can act with perfect independence." "Without being convinced," Elwin said, in narrating the conversation, "I yielded to Lockhart's solicitations."<sup>1</sup> To facilitate the deputy editor's independence Lockhart avoided putting him and Croker into direct communication with each other. They only became personally acquainted at Croker's own request. "I am glad," he wrote to Murray, "that you are pleased with Mr. Elwin. Don't you think it might be convenient that I should know him too?"<sup>2</sup>

The "over-Murray"-ing was a less serious complaint, and it did not weigh at all with Lockhart's coadjutor. From the first the publisher of the Quarterly had retained a considerable voice in its management, and at times the successive editors may have thought themselves hampered by this. But nothing had ever happened to disturb their cordial relations, and, under his own circumstances, Elwin was only too glad to have Murray's responsible help. During the preparation of his first number, for October, 1853, he kept up almost a daily correspondence with the publisher, consulting him on every point that occurred. He cancelled at once a paper of his own on "Travels in India," after it was in type, because Murray's opinion of it was not quite favourable. "It does not take much," he said, "to make me side with those who think I miss the mark."<sup>3</sup> "Now I have no editor," he wrote again, "I must look to you."<sup>4</sup>

He did not, however, in the least regard his office as a

<sup>1</sup> MS. Memorandum.

<sup>2</sup> Croker to Murray, Aug. 17, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> To Murray, Sept. 17, 1853.

<sup>4</sup> The same, Sept. 3, 1853.

sinecure. Lockhart once told Murray that there were only three contributors to the Review who could produce an article that he could insert without revision. He had been accustomed to alter freely, and his deputy determined to follow his example. He began merrily. He wrote to Miss Holley, "I send you the MS. of one of the articles, that you may see how much trimming these joints require before they are ready for the spit. I dare-say the author will be extremely angry at having been put into the melting-pot, and will protest that I have extracted the gold instead of the dross."<sup>1</sup> Contrary to expectation, no one proved so easy to deal with as Croker. Troublesome he certainly was, as Lockhart had said, but chiefly through his habit of sending undigested productions to be printed, with the intention of making wholesale alterations in the proof. "It is my way," he wrote, "to throw out my thoughts as they come—strong censure or praise—and I afterwards tone down to a soberer colour."<sup>2</sup> His first draft was always prolix; and its necessary condensation was made when it was in print. Elwin said he usually cut out the best parts and left in the worst. So repeated were his revisions that they were continued up to the last minute, and in October, 1853, Elwin had to make a special journey to London in order to see his delayed sheets through the press. Otherwise Croker behaved very considerately, and with unlooked-for deference, to the young deputy-editor. "I shall always be grateful," he wrote to him, "for any corrections that you may think proper to make." "Treat it now," he said, in sending a last revise of an article, "as if it was your own."<sup>3</sup> So pleased was Elwin with him that he wrote to Murray, "Oh that we had a dozen Crokers!"<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sept. 8th, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> Croker to Elwin, Sept. 21, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> Croker to Elwin, Sept. 11 and 14, 1853.

<sup>4</sup> Sept. 25, 1853.



He did not find other contributors so meek. Arthur Stanley had drawn up a paper on "The Holy Places" of Jerusalem. In spite of his reputation as an author, Elwin found fault with it for many serious deficiencies, over-attenuated reflections, involved sentences, and clumsy composition. "He is a most careless writer," he said, "very troublesome to correct," especially from his "habit of repeating the same word, sometimes six times over in as many sentences."<sup>1</sup> Stanley took momentary offence at finding himself edited in a degree to which he had not been accustomed. Owing to his brief ebullition the editor refrained from incorporating a considerable section of new matter from his own pen. "The susceptibility of authors," he wrote, in commenting on this point, "stands in the way of pruning as much as I could wish."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless he recognised that he had used his knife considerably. "The contributors," he said to Murray, after receiving the acknowledgments of their cheques, "are all in excellent humour, which is a great thing considering the extensive changes made in most of their productions, and the want of that authority which Lockhart's name must have carried with it."<sup>3</sup>

Elwin regarded this first attempt as a mere experiment, "which was not even to last to a second number unless it proved successful."<sup>4</sup> "As regards myself personally," he wrote, "I do not mind the little rubs of the road, but when some little difficulty arises I am rather troubled by the fear lest I should not be managing for you as well as I might."<sup>5</sup> Murray's generous disposition was so natural to himself that it did not occur to him that it needed expressing in words, and verbally he was often more prone

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Sept. 14 and 24, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Sept. 25, 1853.

<sup>4</sup> The same, Sept. 24, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> The same, Oct. 24, 1853.

<sup>5</sup> The same, Sept. 25, 1853.

to criticism than praise. Elwin inferred from a few of his remarks that he was beginning to doubt whether he had done wisely in entrusting the Review to so inexperienced a hand. He therefore wrote to Murray, "It requires that there should be some confidence that the pilot is steering the ship, on the whole, with tolerable discretion, and unless you had, or hoped hereafter to have, this faith, I wished for your own sake that you should get, what you will easily find, a worthier editor."<sup>1</sup> As soon, however, as the publisher found that the motive of his critical observations had been misunderstood, he wrote a warm letter of encouragement. This put Elwin into such good spirits that he settled down with renewed energy to a task which he said he found "very agreeable." He began writing an essay himself, on the "Life and Works of Gray," for the Christmas number, which he was determined to make still better than the last. This determination was enhanced by a kind letter from Lockhart to Murray, praising the October issue. "I feel of his commendation," Whitwell Elwin wrote, "just what a schoolboy does when he is praised by his master."<sup>2</sup>

He was resolved to be rigid about what articles he admitted. "The Review," he said, "does not exist for the benefit of the contributors, and while treating them with all possible courtesy, I will be firm in rejecting inferior essays."<sup>3</sup> It was only with Croker that he felt some diffidence in exercising his editorial functions. "With all the other contributors," he said, "I speak my sentiments freely, and find them rational and accommodating. I do not know that J. W. C. would be otherwise, but I feel that he is entitled to more deference than anybody else, and do not interfere with him."<sup>4</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Oct. 2, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> The same, Oct. 5, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Nov. 30, 1853.

<sup>4</sup> The same, Dec. 7, 1853.

necessity for interference arose almost immediately, however, over an article which Croker wrote on King Joseph Bonaparte. Publisher and editor both dissented from it and remonstrated. Croker resisted, but when they returned to the charge, he "behaved admirably," as Elwin wrote to Murray,<sup>1</sup> and cancelled all they had objected to. Even after he had done so much for them, he still said that he would "take a day or two with the pruning-hook, or rather, the bill-hook."<sup>2</sup> Having lopped off all the branches he could, he wrote to the editor, "I commit the revise to you with perfect frankness, and an earnest desire that you will freely score out anything and everything that you think may be spared. . . . Strike out boldly and honestly, and then send me your revise that I may endeavour to execute your omissions and suggestions with as little laceration, or at least as little show of it, as possible."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps Elwin scarcely did his sincerity justice. "J. W. C.," he wrote to Murray, "does not wish me to act on his permission, but I shall take him at his word."<sup>4</sup> Consequently, as he disliked the whole production, he curtailed it, as he said, so as to "have as little of the article as possible," and to "take the sting out of his paper."<sup>5</sup> Croker bore all this with wonderful amiability. "Not only soften," he wrote, "but omit anything that you may think harsh or superfluous. My pen is apt to run into hard words, and you will (independently of all more general considerations) do me a personal favour when you oil any such grating passages, of the disagreeable effect of which I am myself not conscious."<sup>6</sup> The fact is that Croker, who had vehement, and sometimes perverse, opinions of his own, was yet so

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Dec. 16, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> Croker to Murray, Dec. 18, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> Croker to Elwin, Dec. 23, 1853.

<sup>4</sup> To Murray, Dec. 25, 1853.

<sup>5</sup> The same, Dec. 29, 1853, and Jan. 5, 1854.

<sup>6</sup> Croker to Elwin, Jan. 8, 1854.



emphatic as to the need of editorial authority, that he always was prepared to yield, when he could not carry the day, with a better grace than some who had less claim to consideration. When Gifford, as early as 1817, had made some revision which he disapproved of in one of his articles, Croker wrote to Murray that he regretted it, but added, "I am one of those who never complain (on personal grounds) of the despotism of the editor, which I think it absolutely necessary to maintain."<sup>1</sup>

Elwin's mind and Croker's ran in such different channels that it was inevitable there should soon be a formidable collision between them, when once the young sub-editor had entered the lists against the veteran contributor. The story is worth telling because it illustrates the independence and power which Elwin brought to bear on the Review, and also the strong and weak points of Croker's character in his relations with the Quarterly.

When Lockhart was going abroad in 1853, he thought there were no signs that any political question of importance was likely to arise during his absence. If any complication should occur, though he distrusted Croker on many points, he relied on him to deal with a matter of this kind prudently in the Review. Contrary to expectation, one of the most serious political difficulties of the century came to a head in the autumn of 1853. The affairs in the East were then on the brink of the dilemmas which resulted in the Crimean War. Croker, who at times had been the Quarterly's political writer, was at this period averse to meddling with politics.<sup>2</sup> Elwin wanted to take advantage of his reluctance to employ some other writer to treat the Eastern question, so as to keep Croker from interfering with it at all. "When he has once taken

<sup>1</sup> Smiles's *Memoir of Murray*, vol. ii. p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Croker to Murray, Dec. 5, 1853.

up a view," Elwin wrote to Murray, "he will keep to it stiffly, however wrong he may be. . . . Give him what books you will, his article will wear two colours—that of hostility to France, and of approbation of Russia."<sup>1</sup> An understanding, however, was arrived at, through Murray's negotiation, which seemed satisfactory to all three.<sup>2</sup> While the article was preparing, Croker kept both the publisher and the editor apprised of the line he was taking, which was that already prognosticated by Elwin. Croker knew that it was a line which would not be approved, and although he said that he should advance nothing for which he had not warrant, he repeatedly observed that he would be quite ready to have his contribution rejected. "I assure you," he wrote to Murray, in view of this probable decision, "it will not create a cloud, not a mist, between us."<sup>3</sup> Elwin urged emphatically that Croker's partisanship was one which the Quarterly could not espouse. "That France was to blame in the beginning," he said, "I quite believe, but Russia has behaved basely in the middle and the end, and I never remember the public so unanimous upon any question as upon this."<sup>4</sup> Croker admitted that the advocacy of Russia would be "for the moment unpopular, but," he said, "only because popular opinion is ignorant and prejudiced: that is only the more reason with *me* for telling the truth."<sup>5</sup>

Much correspondence passed on both sides, and it was evident there was going to be a struggle over the paper. Elwin waited, before going up to London to see the number through the press, till Croker should be nearing the end of his work. After being detained by roads blocked with

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Dec. 16, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Dec. 19 and 20, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> Croker to Murray, Jan. 3 and 4, 1854.

<sup>4</sup> To Murray, Jan. 3, 1854.

<sup>5</sup> Croker to Murray, Jan. 3, 1854.

snow, he reached town on January 9th, to find what Croker called his "unpalatable advice"<sup>1</sup> ready for inspection. Elwin and Murray, as a matter of course, condemned it. Croker, on his part, stood out for the correctness of his view. The three met in conference at the publisher's house in Albemarle Street, on January 11th, to discuss the matter. The argument was a tussle for supremacy. "He began," said Whitwell Elwin, in narrating the scene, "by adopting a lofty tone, and when I held to my point he got louder and louder until his voice was heard over the whole house, and Mrs. Murray afterwards told me that she sat in terror at the furious controversy which was proceeding. Murray, who was in the room when the discussion began, fled after the first five minutes, and no more was seen of him till Croker left the house. When, after hours of wrangling, he found that he made no way, he grew conciliatory; but, as the admission of the article was an impossibility, his soft language could have no more effect than his loud."<sup>2</sup> Croker went home, considered his paper again, but saw no way in which he could alter it without leading "to a lame and impotent conclusion." "With the clear opinion," he wrote to Elwin, "that you both have that Russia's intentions were insincere, and the inability in which I am to prove that she meant no more than she said, I think that it would be impossible to alter the article so as to meet either your *special* doubt, or Murray's *general* and *ab initio* objections, and therefore I am not able to suggest any other course than that of total suppression, as arranged when we parted. I regret it, because I think my views both new and true, and such as would have lifted the Q. R. out of the vulgar tracks in which public opinion is now labouring.

<sup>1</sup> Croker to Elwin, Jan. 9, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> MS. Memorandum of Conversation, revised by Whitwell Elwin.



The day is not distant when the whole will be seen to be, what I now think it, a French intrigue, and we, who are duped by it, will be ashamed of ourselves."<sup>1</sup>

Croker despatched this letter late on Wednesday evening, January 11th, and the next morning sent Murray a "hurried note" to say that he would endeavour to replace the withdrawn article by another on a different political subject. He wrote hard, and in the evening of the same day sent first one, and then a second instalment of it to the editor, in order that he might decide whether he should proceed further. He had taken the vast subject of our "Colonial, Foreign, and Domestic Policy, the latter including the Church, the Court, and Reform."<sup>2</sup> Neither the topic nor the contents commended themselves to the editor, who declined it more promptly than he had declined its predecessor. Croker again succumbed without demur. "All's well," he wrote, "that ends well. I have shown my *zeal*: you have shown your *discretion*. So terminates that episode to MY great relief."<sup>3</sup>

Croker made one more attempt to retain his footing. He urged that, whatever political paper was being written, it should aim at rallying "the old monarchical party," because he believed English opinion to be drifting towards a rabid republicanism. "If your article," he said, "is such as admits of any allusion to the crisis, and the author and you think that I could point a moral at its close, or be of any other use, I need not say that my septuagenarian pen is at his or your service."<sup>4</sup> The editor was not, however, in a humour to yield the ground he had gained. The gap

<sup>1</sup> Croker to Elwin, Jan 9, 1854. Croker's view, it may be observed, was on many points not very different from that at which Kinglake subsequently arrived, when he wrote his *History of the Crimean War*.

<sup>2</sup> Croker to Murray, Jan. 12, 1854.

<sup>3</sup> Croker to Elwin, Jan. 11, 1854.

<sup>4</sup> The same, Jan. 13, 1854.

in the Review was being filled by A. H. Layard, in a paper on "Russia and Turkey," which was in harmony with the general feeling of the country against Russia. Elwin raced home by the mail train on Saturday night, January 14th, to take his services on Sunday, returning to London the first thing on Monday morning to push the last pages of the belated Review through the press. Neither the conflict, nor the inconveniences that arose out of it, had perturbed him. "I have had as happy a week in town," he said, "as it is possible for me to have anywhere away from home."<sup>1</sup>

What is more surprising, and greatly to Croker's credit, is that he, too, preserved absolute equanimity. He had blustered in order to get his way, but apparently without anger, and there was not the faintest trace, either then or later, that he felt any personal resentment at being defeated. He only regretted that the editor and publisher had both been "seduced by the popular voice" into supporting what he thought a false and mischievous view of the situation. "What really annoys me," he wrote to Murray, after the number was published, "is to see the *Q. R. following*, not *leading*; and instead of making a sensation, coming out with an echo of what the newspapers had wearied us with. But, as you are really the person most interested, I am, after all, glad that you took another hand that certainly has done its part very well, though I think the part was fundamentally wrong."<sup>2</sup> This was, under the circumstances, a generous and unselfish criticism. He was nearly twice the age of his opponent, had been associated with the Quarterly from its foundation, and one of its principal contributors for more than thirty years before Elwin had submitted his

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Jan. 15, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> Croker to Murray, Feb. 7, 1854.

first attempt for Lockhart's approval. Yet he gave in with good temper to this new writer of only ten years' standing, who was but a temporary editor acting for an absent chief. He recognised the significance of the result, and expressed his acceptance of it by jestingly signing one of his letters to Murray, "Kroker-off."<sup>1</sup> "There is both humour and good humour in C.'s signature," was Elwin's comment. "Nevertheless," he continued, "if he lives, he means upon the first convenient opportunity to get his pound of flesh from me. He vexes me when he writes bad and bitter reviews. Otherwise I cannot help liking him."<sup>2</sup>

In spite of the dissension, Croker prepared his usual two articles for the Spring number of 1854, in the intervals between alarming attacks of illness. One of the papers was on Lord John Russell's Reform Bill—a measure which Whitwell Elwin thought "one of the most wanton and perilous experiments ever proposed."<sup>3</sup> There were fresh disputes over this essay, and Croker came to the conclusion that he was "out of date," or at least "out of season."<sup>4</sup> In April, 1854, he offered to cancel his agreement with Murray, and Murray took him at his word. Even this, however, produced no soreness. "I am happy," wrote Elwin when he heard Murray's report of the matter, "that Croker parts with the Q. R. in kindness. Some loss he will doubtless be, but I am very positive that the gain will be greater."<sup>5</sup> The only fear was "that Lockhart might regret his secession." "Croker," Elwin observed, "saved an editor some trouble, but Lockhart must think of him as he *is*, and not as he *was*. There has recently been a

<sup>1</sup> Croker to Murray, Feb. 3, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, Feb., 1854.

<sup>3</sup> The same, Feb. 17, 1854.

<sup>4</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, Art. "Croker."

<sup>5</sup> To Murray, April 14, 1854.



great failure of power, with every prospect that the evil was on the increase."<sup>1</sup>

The squabbles did not quite cease with Croker's retirement from the staff. The Duke of Bedford charged his anti-Reform article with false statements, which Croker would not admit to be such, and which he would not retract. Elwin said he should withdraw them himself, but Croker resented this so strongly that it ended in nothing being done. "This transaction," Elwin said, at a later date, "was the most serious distress which ever came to me through the Review. I abhor abuse, attacks upon private character, and above all injustice and want of candour, and to have been made the instrument of what I loathe and detest was a real affliction to me."<sup>2</sup>

These difficulties produced no quarrel between Croker and Elwin. A few months after their final split they met, in October, 1854, and "conversed amicably,—nay, cordially, for three hours."<sup>3</sup> "I had compunctious visitings," Elwin wrote, on receiving Croker's praise of a subsequent number of the Review, in 1855, "for, though it was absolutely necessary to withstand him, I always feel sorry that he drove me to it."<sup>4</sup> "In spite of the bitterness and injustice of his writings," he said later, "he had fine and generous elements in his nature."<sup>5</sup>

The Quarterly for March, 1854, contained the critical memoir of Sterne, which ranks among the best of Whitwell Elwin's contributions. "I have long had a wish," he wrote, as he was preparing it, "to say my say upon that unhappy man, and his deservedly neglected, though in some respects most felicitous works."<sup>6</sup> He did not estimate his own

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, April 16, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, Nov. 8, 1856.

<sup>3</sup> Elwin to Miss Holley, Oct. 12, 1854.

<sup>4</sup> To Murray, Nov. 8, 1855.

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Feb., 1874.

<sup>6</sup> To Murray, Feb. 8, 1854.

essay at its true value. "*My* part of Sterne," he wrote to a friend, "is nothing, but you will laugh at the extracts from Tristram Shandy."<sup>1</sup> Of these he gave several. "As a rule," he said, "I should make few or no extracts from a book which had been long before the world, but Tristram Shandy has quite dropped out of notice, and, except to a few literary men, the passages I have given will be as fresh as if they had been printed for the first time yesterday. They have often made me laugh till I cried."<sup>2</sup> That Sterne's humour had this repeated effect on him was a testimony to its greatness. Of Byron's "Letter to my Grandmother" he had remarked, a few months before, "I observe that all who read it for the first time go into fits of laughter. It tickled me greatly when I read it originally, but the fun seems flat upon re-perusal."<sup>3</sup> Sterne's fun read fresher in the Quarterly than it did in his own book, through being separated from the inferior and coarser verbiage in which his real wit was entangled and smothered.

Lockhart returned from his furlough in April, 1854, so little better that he at once decided that his *locum tenens* must "resume his oars as to the next boat," and thus "complete an annual cycle at least" of deputy editorship.<sup>4</sup> "It is physically impossible," he wrote to him, "for me to have any share in the next number. *Humeri ferre recusant*. I must at all events have out the year of freedom."<sup>5</sup> Murray proposed a kind of joint editorship, in which Lockhart should be assisted in the heavy work, but should have a voice in the critical supervision of articles. Elwin expressed a perfect willingness to be "Lockhart's squire" in a "subordinate position."<sup>6</sup> Lock-

<sup>1</sup> March 30, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, March 26, 1854.

<sup>3</sup> The same, Oct. 20, 1853.

<sup>4</sup> Lockhart to Murray, April 27, 1854.

<sup>5</sup> Lockhart to Elwin, May 1, 1854.

<sup>6</sup> To Murray, April 19, 1854.

hart, suspecting that he was "not likely to be again in possession of the physical and nervous vigour required in *the* editor," wanted to take the second place, as a kind of "private chamber counsel," who would advise without being finally responsible.<sup>1</sup> Elwin and Murray breakfasted with him, in London, on May 4, in order to confer as to the course that should be pursued, and Elwin insisted that Lockhart must take the lead if he could. "I think," Lockhart wrote to him, after taking time to consider the matter, "the wise and simple plan is to try. If we see, after a little, that we work pleasantly according to your generous and most modest programme, good and well. If we find hitches inconvenient for either or both,—why, we shall be no worse than before the attempt,—not, I am very sure, as respects our personal relations."<sup>2</sup> "Henceforth," Elwin wrote to Murray, "we may consider the Q. R. as transformed from a one horse brougham into a carriage and pair. The travelling will be so much the better, I doubt not. I shall enjoy working with Lockhart."<sup>3</sup>

This, however, was not to be. Instead of improving in health Lockhart was fast sinking to his grave. He read a few manuscripts, and made some slight suggestions, but was not able to give any substantial assistance. His interest, however, did not abate. When the Review came out in July, 1854, he perused the whole of it critically, and though he had very little good to say of the individual contributions, he thought it, "in the aggregate, a very instructive and interesting number."<sup>4</sup>

With the October issue he had even less to do. Whitwell Elwin threw himself into the preparation of this with a sense that the responsibility of independent editorship

<sup>1</sup> Lockhart to Murray, April 27, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> Lockhart to Elwin, May 10, 1854.

<sup>3</sup> To Murray, May 11, 1854.

<sup>4</sup> Lockhart to Elwin, July 14, 1854.



had practically lapsed into his hands by no choice of his own. He therefore exerted himself to obtain fresh writers, who were competent, by their knowledge, to deal with special subjects. Among others, he enlisted John Forster,<sup>1</sup> to whom he had been introduced by Peter Cunningham, at a dinner at the Garrick Club, on January 12th, 1854. A warm and intimate friendship sprang up between them at once, and lasted to the end of Forster's life. Forster's paper in the *Quarterly* of October, 1854, was on Samuel Foote. It was considered not only by far the best in the number, but of very high intrinsic merit. Lord Brougham wrote to Elwin, "that nothing he had read for a long while had struck him so much." In the proof it had extended to the inordinate length of six sheets. "I made him," says Elwin, writing at the time, "cut it down to four, and he could not have groaned more during the operation if I had cut off his legs and arms. It is too long still. But the moment we had finished he seemed to expand, with a face radiant with joy and fun."<sup>2</sup> The same *Quarterly* contained an article by the editor on Goldsmith, which was ostensibly a review of Forster's *Life*, but really an independent biography of his hero. "Upon the whole," Elwin wrote, in November, "this number of the *Review* is the most popular I have yet superintended. Murray writes word that it is a common observation that the *Review* has turned over a new leaf. On the other hand, the high Tories of the Croker school complain that it reflects no longer their bigoted politics and antiquated prejudices."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, politics had been altogether ignored.

Lockhart's criticisms were not so favourable as those of the public. "All this is too deep for me," he wrote, of one

<sup>1</sup> The biographer of Goldsmith, Dickens, etc.

<sup>2</sup> To Miss Holley, Oct. 12, 1854.

<sup>3</sup> The same, Nov. 4, 1854.

of the contributions sent to him in proof. "I only admire the audacity that can deal with it in English type, and still more the contrast with the old style of thought and word in the Q. R. A page would have made Gifford faint."<sup>1</sup> When the Review came out, he wrote again, "I hope I shall not again have to face such a regiment of articles—none light—rushing in together. My poor physique could not stand the unexpected terror a second time."<sup>2</sup> His "poor physique" made him captious as he read the pages through the medium of a suffering frame. The "second time," of which he spoke, never came to him. He died on the 25th of November, 1854, before another number was published.

Lockhart's irritability with the articles was not extended to their editor. Usually cold in his outward manner, he had nearly always, in his correspondence with Elwin, adhered to the formal address of "My dear Sir," in which, indeed, there was nothing singular, for at that date it was still common between those who were personally acquainted with each other. Latterly, however, he had sometimes alternated it with "Dear Mr. Elwin." But in 1854 the formality entirely ceased, and he uniformly began, "Dear Elwin." Whitwell Elwin himself always recalled his associations with Lockhart with gratitude. "He was a man," he wrote to Murray, after his death, "of a supercilious turn of mind; but he had rare qualities and rare talents."<sup>3</sup> "My obligations to him are very great," he had written earlier, July 28th, 1853, "for it is to the kind encouragement he gave me, when I was a total stranger to him, that I owe half the happiness and prosperity of my life."<sup>4</sup> It is impossible, indeed, to over-estimate what the new editor owed to the years of joint

<sup>1</sup> Lockhart to Elwin, Sept. 29, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Oct. 2, 1854.

<sup>3</sup> To Murray, Dec. 7, 1854.

<sup>4</sup> To the same.

work with his predecessor. The effect was seen in the extraordinary rapidity with which his own literary skill developed during this short period. It was from Lockhart that he learned the art of combining biography and criticism, in which he afterwards greatly excelled his master. It was work in company with Lockhart that obliged him to bend his bow with his full strength, and taught him how high he could shoot. The result was that, when he became sole editor of the *Quarterly* at thirty-eight, he was a brilliant and finished essayist and man of letters.

Long afterwards, in 1871, Carlyle begged Elwin to write the *Life* of his old chief, but, though he continued to urge it on him,<sup>1</sup> it was without avail. The subject would have been congenial, and doubtless it was materials that were lacking. To the end Elwin spoke of him with affection, and when, towards the close of his own life, he removed nearly all the pictures from the walls of his house when he was having them papered and painted, he kept Lockhart's portrait alone in the room where he generally sat.

<sup>1</sup> Lang's *Life of Lockhart*, vol. ii. p. 224.



## CHAPTER V

1854-1856

THE CRIMEAN WAR — POLITICAL POSITION OF THE  
REVIEW—SIR E. BULWER LYTTON—GLADSTONE—  
RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSY AND QUESTIONS OF THE  
DAY.

IT was in the autumn of 1854 that the post of editor of the Quarterly Review was finally thrust upon Elwin. "I am still doomed," he wrote, after the publication of the October number, "to go about with a clog on my leg. I made great efforts to get out of the Review, was very energetic and very firm, but it only produced painful scenes and entreaties, and I must continue it for the present. The misfortune is that there is not a soul just now, in London or out, who is in the least eligible for the office. I named everybody I could think of, but there was some fatal objection to all." So clear had he made it that he did not covet the editorship that early in 1855 he was rumoured to be about retiring from it. "I did wish," he replied to Lord Brougham's inquiries as to the truth of this, "to be relieved of the task, and pressed the point strongly. Yet, when it proved there was no disengaged person to whom it was thought expedient to entrust the office, I resolved to vanquish my disinclination to continue, and settle down to the work."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To Lord Brougham, March 28, 1855.

It was well for Whitwell Elwin that he had had some preliminary experience of conducting the Review before the sole responsibility came on his shoulders, for his independent editorship commenced at a period of considerable difficulty and importance. The winter of 1854-5 was a time when the feelings of the country were deeply stirred with regard to the Crimean War,—first with emotion at the gallantry of the army, and then with concern at the incapacity of the Government. Everything that was written on the topic was eagerly scanned. The new editor felt keenly upon the subject, and made the Review speak as emphatically as he felt.

Of all political questions none interested Elwin so much as those on foreign policy, and when to policy was added war, his interest became absorbing. Of war in the abstract he had a great horror. "I can conceive no good which springs out of war," he once wrote to Lord Brougham, "which would not have been equally effected by pacific measures."<sup>1</sup> But he had a good deal of the soldier in his constitution, and an unlimited admiration of the heroism involved in a soldier's profession. He therefore followed the news from the Crimea with intense eagerness. "The battle of the Alma," he wrote, on the arrival of the tidings of it, "was a very gallant business. Our troops, in their best days, never went more bravely to the cannon's mouth. The account of the deaths made a great sensation in London, and I saw tears in the eyes of many men whom I should have thought incapable of shedding one for such a cause."<sup>2</sup> The magnificent conduct of the army, followed by what was generally thought the masterly flank march of Lord Raglan to the unprotected side of Sebastopol, led to the anticipation of a rapid and

<sup>1</sup> To Lord Brougham, Sept. 26, 1858.

<sup>2</sup> To Miss Holley, Oct. 12, 1854.

brilliant termination to the contest. "All thoughts and eyes here," he wrote to a friend abroad, on November 4th, "are directed to Sebastopol. Nothing else has the slightest interest, and men are living almost with suspended breath, in eager expectation of the decisive news." When, instead of decisive news, there came reports of the indecisive actions of Balaklava and "the terrible Inkerman,"—of the sufferings of the men from want of supplies, and of the uncertain prospects of the siege,—a profound anxiety took the place of exultant expectation. It was significant of Elwin's strong character that he never for a moment yielded to the gloomy forebodings of others. "The English," he said, "are a curious people. They love fighting, and those who are engaged in the conflict are hardly to be daunted by any reverses. Yet the public at home are full of despondency at the least delay or the slightest accident. The siege of Sebastopol has gone on more rapidly and prosperously than almost any other siege of equal magnitude upon record. Nevertheless the depression in London has been extreme, because the place did not tumble to pieces like a house of cards. There has really been a sort of panic, and it almost fills one with contempt to see such an utter want of moral spirit, not to say common sense. In a campaign, as in a prize fight, even the victor gets some bruises. The calamities of war must afflict everybody who reflects upon them. If I were to give way to my feelings, I could sit down and cry. But, as we have entered into the contest, it is disgraceful to go about with our hearts in our shoes, while our valiant soldiers are exposing their hearts to the guns of the enemy."<sup>1</sup>

Even Elwin, however, soon had to admit the gravity of the situation. "Nobody," he wrote on November 15th,

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Nov. 4, 1854.



"thinks of anything but Sebastopol. The despondency has continued, or rather, I should say, increased. There is some ground for alarm. My own belief still is that our soldiers will hold their position, and come off triumphant. The issue rests with God, and that is my comfort."<sup>1</sup> "My admiration of the heroic calmness of the Commanders in their most difficult position is unbounded, and as for the charge of the light cavalry there is nothing in Greek or Roman history to surpass it."<sup>2</sup> His patriotism extended to the point of being willing to surrender a son to the exigencies of the war, though to no one would the sacrifice have been heavier. "It would be vain," he wrote to his friend abroad, on November 25th, "to attempt to convey to you any notion of the intense feeling which this war excites. Lately the public were all anxiety. Now, though the anxiety is not entirely removed, they are full of a sort of mournful enthusiasm at the marvellous gallantry of our men. There is nothing in romance to surpass the wonderful heroism with which 8,000 British soldiers sustained, for upwards of two hours, the shock of 45,000 Russians, supported by murderous artillery."<sup>3</sup> The spirit of the country is up. Men enlist with the utmost avidity, and the bloodier the actions, the more they are eager to share the danger and the glory. The demand for commissions among the higher classes is unexampled. Fount<sup>4</sup> was crazy to have an ensigncy, but it turned out upon inquiry that he was not old enough, which has happily quieted him for the present. I do not think that any family is justified—at least none who share my views of the contest—in exempting themselves from their portion of the burden, even though it should entail a life-long sorrow, and I should not therefore have refused to

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Nov. 15, 1854.    <sup>2</sup> To Murray, Nov. 16, 1854.

<sup>3</sup> At Inkerman.

<sup>4</sup> His eldest son, then 15½ years old.

let Fount go, if, with the full consciousness that he must expect to find a grave, he had persevered in the desire. I need not add, however, how grateful I am to be spared such a trial. Alas for those who have drunk, or are drinking, the bitter cup! It is not the soldier who falls in battle that I pity—always supposing him to be fit to die—for *his* troubles are soon over. It is the broken-hearted relatives (and England is full of them already) that are the real objects of compassion.”<sup>1</sup>

There was a difficulty in selecting a competent writer on the war, for the Christmas number of the Quarterly. The editor wished to find someone who was qualified to expound its political and military technicalities, while he reserved to himself the honour of paying a tribute to the personal heroism of the army. Forster, however, urged him to perform the whole task himself, and as Murray was of the same mind, he hesitatingly yielded. “It is of vast importance,” he said, “that the article should be equal to the occasion, and I never undertook anything with so much reluctance and misgiving. I would have given £600 to find a substitute.” As soon as he had made up his mind that he must do it, he devoted himself wholly to the subject, arranging careful abstracts of newspaper reports, and studying the despatches of the Peninsular War, in order to obtain light upon what was parallel in the affairs of the Crimea.

<sup>1</sup> “One of the Guards who belonged to a battalion that was left in England, volunteered into a battalion which was ordered to the East. On wishing him Good-bye, Colonel Hopwood added, ‘I hope I shall see you back full of health and glory.’ ‘No, sir,’ said the man, ‘that is impossible. You will never see me again. Just look at my *height*!’ He was 6 ft. 4 in., and yet with this conviction that, exposing such a mark as he did to the enemy, he could never come alive out of a battle, he voluntarily thrust himself forward from his eagerness to join in the fray. Poor fellow! his wish was never gratified, for he died of cholera at Varna.”—Elwin to Miss Holley, Jan. 14, 1855.

After three weeks of hard work Elwin had nearly finished qualifying himself, when Layard returned from the East, eager to write on the subject. He had been present at all the three great battles, and in the trenches before Sebastopol, and could describe the events as an eye-witness. Elwin, therefore, at once, generously yielded to him the office of telling the story of the campaign, with the result that the Quarterly was able to give a clearer and better account of it than any that had yet appeared in England. The editor himself turned to the more political aspect of the affair for his own theme. It was not a very easy one to treat. The Ministry had to be indicted for negligence and incompetence, which would have presented no difficulty in a Tory journal, if the Tory party had not been so disorganised at the time that it could offer no materials for a rival Government. Elwin considered that it was useless to point out the errors of Lord Aberdeen's Cabinet "in the spirit of party," but nevertheless thought it ought to be done "in a spirit of patriotism."<sup>1</sup> He produced a very powerful paper,—trenchant, dignified, and fearless,—which Forster said he read "with admiration and agreement for its temper and moderation, even in severity."<sup>2</sup> "In a struggle of life and death," said Elwin, in the article, "those who assume the responsibility of conducting affairs must display a prescience and an energy commensurate with the magnitude of the stake. It is a prerogative of superior minds to rise with the occasion, and the men who seize upon the post of honour must show themselves worthy of it, or incur a censure as overwhelming as the calamities they cause." Maintaining that the Aberdeen Ministry had been the dupes of a false security, he wrote thus: "Ministers, said Burke, are placed upon an eminence that they may

<sup>1</sup> Elwin to Murray, Nov. 25, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> MS. Diary.



command a more extended horizon. Ours took up their position in a hollow, and, gazing upwards at the stars, indulged in dreams of serenity and peace. If their sluggishness in making those preliminary preparations which would have enforced the arguments of their diplomacy was unwise before, it was little short of insanity when the fray between the principals had actually begun." Lord Aberdeen he described as "an amiable, and, in some respects, an able and well-informed nobleman, but of all existing politicians the very worst which could have been selected for an European crisis." The Duke of Newcastle, he said, had not "the faculties for the task" of a Minister of War; and, though these are so peculiar that it was "no disparagement to him that he should not be equal to the emergency," he blamed him for clinging to a post for which he was "universally pronounced to be unfitted." He therefore urged the formation of "a War Government irrespective of party,—the distinctions of Whig and Conservative are suspended for the time,"—and in such a Ministry he held that Lord Ellenborough, who had displayed throughout "a singular knowledge and sagacity," should have the office of War Minister.<sup>1</sup> "With all his faults," Elwin wrote to Murray, "he would be admirable in that post."<sup>2</sup>

The authorship of the article was kept a profound secret. "All the weight will be gone," he said, "if it was known that it proceeded from a village parson."<sup>3</sup> Layard's narrative of the campaign and the editor's assault on the Government together brought the Review so large a sale that before a month was out a second edition was called for. "On the whole," he said, writing of his political essay, "the result of this first experiment has exceeded by

<sup>1</sup> *Quarterly Review*, vol. xcvi. pp. 278, 279, 288, 296, 297.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, Dec. 19, 1854.

<sup>3</sup> The same, Jan. 17, 1855.

much my expectations. I do not wish, however, to dabble in these troubled waters. I did it from necessity, not from choice, and I shall make for the shore as soon as I can find a substitute."<sup>1</sup>

He was obliged to repeat the experiment in the following number, when he agreed with Murray that "Politics and the War must be the main string of our fiddle."<sup>2</sup> In the interval the Aberdeen Ministry had fallen, but it had merely been reconstituted under Lord Palmerston, and the situation remained so perplexing that it was difficult to entrust criticisms to anyone less responsible than the editor. Elwin did not succeed this time so well as he had done before. He began with a very lucid narrative of the parliamentary events of the previous three months, but Murray not unfairly demurred to relating in the Quarterly what had then been so recently reported in the daily press. As regards the Palmerston Ministry, Elwin made the Review give it "a moderate support, as a War Government upon trial," a position which did not find favour with partisans on either side. The rest of the paper was on some of the points of foreign policy connected with the war, and he rather regretted afterwards that he had not kept to these alone.<sup>3</sup> As it stood, the article was hurriedly pieced together, and was not decisive enough in counsel to influence public opinion strongly.

Elwin went on studying the subject daily, so as to keep himself abreast of events, in case he should be compelled to write upon it again. The necessity did not arise, but he contributed one more Crimean essay, some time later, in January, 1857—the most permanent, and perhaps even at the period the most important of the three—on Lord Raglan himself. In his first article he had strongly sided

<sup>1</sup> Letter, Jan. 26, 1855.      <sup>2</sup> Elwin to Murray, Feb. 8, 1855.

<sup>3</sup> The same, April 13, 1855.

with the commanders, and had deprecated the way in which they had been assailed directly the war became prolonged and its mismanagements apparent. Somewhat to Layard's annoyance he had cancelled certain passages and expressions in his paper on the campaign, in January, 1855, because they seemed to reflect upon the English general. After Lord Raglan's death, someone offered to draw up a detailed defence of his conduct of the war for the Quarterly. The editor eagerly assented to Murray's wish that the offer should be accepted. The materials, however, proved too incomplete for the scheme to be carried out at once, and eventually the duty devolved on the editor himself. He had facilities for doing it which nobody else possessed.

When staying with Lord Brougham, at his country seat in Cumberland, in the autumn of 1856, Whitwell Elwin had first met the Countess of Westmorland.<sup>1</sup> His acquaintance with her was one of the great pleasures of his life. "What a legion of delights for me," he wrote to her, in 1856, "have grown out of that meeting at Brougham! He had held it up to me for weeks as a treat I was to enjoy, and though I believed him I little dreamt of all that would come of it. I smile when I recall the preparations he made for you—how a statue of Lord Erskine was dragged out from some lumber-room and placed in a conspicuous position in the hall, how we all scrubbed the statue for an entire morning with soap and soda to try to get off the stains and dirt of a quarter of a century, how he went about the house hanging up prints where he fancied they would be likely to catch your eye, how he insisted that turtle soup must be got from London, and

<sup>1</sup> Priscilla, daughter of William Wellesley-Pole (afterwards Lord Mornington), elder brother of the Duke of Wellington, married John, Lord Burghersh (afterwards Earl of Westmorland), many years ambassador at Florence, Berlin, and Vienna.



which I remember you did not taste when it came. His anxiety was noticeable from the fact that he never troubled his head about such matters in the smallest degree. His proceedings took everybody by surprise. Then there was a second surprise when you arrived. I understood, of course, that the desire to make the house put on its best appearance was a tribute of extraordinary homage to you, but I inferred at the same time that you must be a person who required homage of this description, or that he would not have turned his attention to upholstery, for the first and last time perhaps in his life. What was my astonishment to see in you the most unaffected and least exacting of human beings. The first quarter of an hour told me that all our toil had been in vain."<sup>1</sup> "Your friendship," he wrote, when it was only just beginning, "has really given a new delight to existence. I have many things for which to be grateful to Lord Brougham, but the greatest service he ever did me was when he made me acquainted with you."<sup>2</sup> "She is the most remarkable woman," he said to Murray, "I have ever met. Besides those great natural gifts which belonged to so many of the Wellesley family, her intellects have been sharpened, and her judgment matured, by her intercourse with the most remarkable people of our time, many of whom—and the Duke especially—confided in her entirely, and consulted her on every occasion. She has a more interesting series of letters from the departed great than I ever saw in the possession of any other person, and the larger part of them are on the weightiest affairs."<sup>3</sup> Among these interesting letters were a number from Lord Raglan, who had married Lady Westmorland's sister. He had the same appreciation of his sister-in-law as the great Duke, and had

<sup>1</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, May 14, 1868.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Nov. 8, 1856.

<sup>3</sup> To Murray, Jan. 14, 1857.

held an intimate correspondence with her from the East, which contained much information about the Crimean war that was not in the hands of the public.

A week or two after his visit to Brougham, Elwin was invited to stay at Lord Westmorland's seat in Northamptonshire, and there he met Lady Raglan and several of her relatives. "All the Raglan family are here," he wrote, from Apethorpe, to Murray, "and they tell me a thousand particulars which show that Lord Raglan was one of the best men and the worst used that ever lived. I have read several of his letters, and you will be surprised how little, if any, of the fault was with him, and how surprisingly culpable were the Government. He foresaw almost everything, and they paid no attention to anything."<sup>1</sup> The result of their talks on the subject was that Elwin was fired with a desire to write a vindication of Lord Raglan for the *Quarterly Review*. On reflection, when he got home, he came to the conclusion that the paper ought to take the form of a complete sketch of the general's life and character. "There is no method," he wrote to Lady Westmorland, "by which we could display Lord Raglan to such great advantage. Add to which that, as no distinct Life of him is likely to appear, it may be the only opportunity of putting a full account of his career before the world. . . . I had it at heart," he added, "to defend Lord Raglan before I knew you, and had done everything in my power to effect it. I had then no other inducement than my admiration for his character and the duty which lays upon me on all occasions to uphold calumniated worth. I have now private motives, which touch me more nearly than the public motives. By witnessing your feelings for him they become my own."<sup>2</sup> "It is

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Nov. 1, 1856.

<sup>2</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, Nov. 6, 1856.

a great honour," he said again, "to assist in the defence of that noble and chivalrous hero, and my humble part in it will be a true satisfaction to me, a privilege and not a task."<sup>1</sup>

The Westmorland and Raglan families put at Elwin's disposal the whole of their materials, which included copies of hitherto unpublished despatches from Lord Raglan to the Government at home. Murray also sent him the advance sheets of the then anonymous work by Major Calthorpe, entitled "Letters from Headquarters, by an Officer of the Staff," the title of which was put at the head of the article. Enticed by this book, Elwin was led away into writing an account of the campaign; but on his wife telling him that this spoilt his paper as a defence of Lord Raglan, he began again, when the Review should have been printing off, and re-wrote it rapidly on a strictly biographical plan.

The notice of Lord Raglan was published in January, 1857. It entirely fulfilled its purpose as a vindication of its hero. A few bitter and angry criticisms were made on it, but no reply was attempted. The Times newspaper, which had been especially antagonistic to the English commander, was expected to make some answer to the essay, but was silent about it, and even began to soften its tone towards the man it had persistently assailed. On the other hand, the encomiums on the article were very cordial. John Forster wrote that he had found Dr. J. R. Hume—who had been physician to the Duke of Wellington from Peninsular days, and intimate with Lord Raglan—reading it on his death-bed, and that it had "affected him in quite an extraordinary way."<sup>2</sup> Sir Francis Head wrote

<sup>1</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, Nov. 8, 1856.

<sup>2</sup> Forster added an interesting passage on his conversation with Hume: "Three days ago he was telling me the story, which has been so often mistold, of his going up to the Duke at three o'clock in the morning of the day after



to a friend of Elwin's: "I read with the greatest interest the tragedy it gives of the life and death of that noble soldier Lord Raglan, whose courageous heart forms a striking contrast with the mean cowardice of the Government who ran away from him the instant the press opened their fire upon him." In consequence of the attention that the article attracted, the whole edition of the *Quarterly* was sold off, and a second called for, by the middle of February. Murray received so many requests for a reprint of the biography that he thought, if it were swelled into a volume, it would be "a stock book with soldiers in the same way that the *Life of Nelson* is with sailors." "Such a bright example," he said, "would always be valued in a high degree as an incentive to others." This was not done, and the sketch remained buried in the pages of the *Review*. Even in its unexpanded form, however, it remains the best approach to a biography of Lord Raglan that exists, and having been written from original sources of information, it must always be a chief authority for his *Life*.

In an incidental paragraph of the article, "the brilliant author of *Eothen*" was referred to as accredited with the duty of becoming the historian of the war. Kinglake afterwards consulted Elwin about the plan of the work,

Waterloo, to tell him of Gordon's death, which had just taken place, and of the deaths of others very dear to him, of which till then he did not know. Gordon had been put in the Duke's bed. Wellington, on finding his bed occupied the night of the battle, went straight up to the room above,—the smallest of rooms, holding the smallest of beds, with white dimity curtains not very clean,—into which, after stripping off all his clothes, he flung himself as he was, with all the dust, sweat, and dirt of the day, unwashed upon him. I really think I have seldom heard anything more striking than Hume's simple account of the way he sat up in the bed,—of his tears rising to his eyes as he listened to the melancholy list, without a word,—and of the channels they gradually made through (literally) the cake of mud on his face, damp already with the perspiration of sleep."—Forster to Elwin, Feb. 14, 1857.

and to some extent modified his own scheme in consequence of his friend's expression of opinion. On the appearance of the first volume in 1863, Kinglake wrote to Elwin that he should never have gone on with it except for his encouragement, and again, in 1880, when a later instalment came out, he remarked a second time that it was Elwin's approval which "went far towards governing" his decision to print at all what he had written.<sup>1</sup> Elwin would have liked to review the early volumes for the *Quarterly*, but, finding that they contained controversial matter, in which he opined that his views would not agree with the editor's, he forebore to make the offer.

Apart from the Crimean war, the early fifties were not years in which it was easy to make a Conservative journal shine upon politics. The old Toryism of the Croker school was almost dead, and the new liberal-conservatism which Disraeli was planting had scarcely taken root. The party was so disorganised that its adherents did not even wish to see it come into power, for it had not cohesion enough to support a Government. After meeting several Members of Parliament at Lord Townshend's house, at Raynham, in the autumn of 1855, Whitwell Elwin wrote, "The Conservatives all exclaim with one voice that they have no party. . . . Division, mistrust, disgust, apathy, reign supreme."<sup>2</sup> This confusion was attributed to Disraeli, whose political programme was, Murray said, "a Radical game played by Tory hands."<sup>3</sup> The editor of the *Quarterly* looked upon him as a mere adventurer. "Disraeli," he said, "has no settled policy. His tactics are to trust to the chapter of accidents, and to endeavour to turn to account any cry which may chance to arise. It was an old dispute as to whether people ought to pin their

<sup>1</sup> Kinglake to Elwin, Oct. 28, 1880.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, Nov. 5, 1855.

<sup>3</sup> Murray to Elwin, Oct. 17, 1855.

faith upon men or measures. Just now we have neither. But I do not believe this state of things will last much longer. People are getting sick and ashamed of Disraeli, and will end by deposing him."<sup>1</sup> "Any journal," he wrote, "would become ridiculous that attempted to adapt itself to his shifting policy."<sup>2</sup>

Elwin's own politics were not of a very exclusive character. He had ceased to be a Whig before he had taken up with the Quarterly. But in abandoning one party he had not by any means unreservedly thrown himself into the arms of the other. "I have not a drop of party feeling in me," he wrote, in 1854, "nor an antipathy to any one political personage in existence, except so far as the want of principle in particular individuals may compel me to disown them."<sup>3</sup> John Forster wrote to him, after a few years of intimate friendship, "You are never, in my mind, associated in the most remote way with this party or with that—as mere advocate or supporter of either. In far serener heights I think of you."<sup>4</sup> Elwin, indeed, aimed at a broader-minded view of political questions than was common. It was principles, not parties, that he tried to uphold. Quite early in his editorial experience he wrote to Murray, "There is no need for us to back up particular men through thick and thin. Indeed, Sir Walter Scott, in some of his correspondence on the original establishment of the Review, gives sagacious reasons why it should not be the mere mouthpiece of any party."<sup>5</sup> Though this position did not displease Murray, it offended those in whose minds party ranked above principle. "It is a very painful fact," Elwin once wrote to Lady Westmorland, "but a fact it is, that partisanship

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Nov. 10, 1855.

<sup>3</sup> Letter, May 25, 1854.

<sup>5</sup> To Murray, Feb. 16, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Oct. 16, 1855.

<sup>4</sup> Forster to Elwin, Feb. 14, 1857.



commonly destroys the love of truth. I constantly find that the persons who write upon politics in the Quarterly Review appear to think that justice to the opposite party is treason to their own. Politics never have been, and never will be, my peculiar study, and no vigilance that I am able to exercise can keep out all spite and misrepresentation. Yet, for doing it so far as I can, I am considered not near so narrow-minded, or, to speak plainly, so dishonest as I ought to be. This portion of my functions often makes me wish to wash my hands of the Review."<sup>1</sup>

Elwin did, indeed, more than once suggest to the publisher that his disapproval of views of a strictly party character was a disqualification for editing the Quarterly. Murray would not for a moment assent to such an idea. Nevertheless, in the autumn of 1855 it was so confidently reported that he had retired from the post on political grounds, that one or two who were writing for the October number "put their pens behind their ears."<sup>2</sup> Under his rule the Review got the reputation for being impartial, which was what he aimed at, and he was especially pleased when the Duke of Bedford paid him the compliment of saying, in 1856, that the Quarterly Review had become distinguished for *truth*."<sup>3</sup>

What Elwin would particularly have liked to see, and to aid, would have been the rise of a Conservative leader who would be superior to partisan influences. At one time he looked upon Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton as a politician who might fill this rôle. It was mainly to enlist the novelist in the political service of the Review, that he accepted an invitation to stay at Knebworth for a couple of days, from July 24th to 26th, 1854. He sounded his

<sup>1</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, Feb. 16, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> Elwin to Murray, Nov. 8, 1855.

<sup>3</sup> The same, Nov. 10, 1855.

host then as to his political views, and afterwards reported the result to Murray, as follows:—

“I will now jot down the substance of what Sir E. Lytton said upon politics, though, as it is difficult to give faithfully the summary of a long and desultory conversation, I may not in every particular record his opinions truly. Still, it will be accurate in the main.

“He said that the Conservative party looked upon the present constitution of Church and State as the machine by which all other reforms were to be worked, that they considered the machine efficient for its purpose, and that any extensive tampering with it would be incurring an immense danger for a doubtful good. But when they turned their attention from the machine itself to the matters upon which it operated, they recognised that there were a variety of social evils which required a cautious and gradual redress;—that the best way of preserving the Crown, Church, and Parliament, in their present condition, was to show that they took cognizance of, and were equal to amending, any real defects in such matters as education, health of towns, administration of the law, etc., etc.;—that the Conservatives ought, therefore, to be as much on the alert in promoting what was really beneficial as in resisting organic changes;—that it was only so that the party could hope to win or keep the favour of the public;—that the general tone of the political articles in the Q. R. had been opposed to all change of every description, and would have led readers to believe that the men it advocated would redress little or nothing;—in a word, that the present Conservative party considered that policy and principle alike required them to stand firm at some points, and to move on in others, whereas the Q. R. was reluctant to move at all.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Aug. 1, 1854.

This precisely expressed Elwin's own sentiments. "I am," he wrote to Murray, a year later, "more a Tory after Lyndhurst's than after Croker's school, but not Croker himself can be more vehemently opposed to innovations in the general system of Church and State."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, exactly as the two coincided in their opinions, the editor did not think well to ask Lytton to write upon politics. In the same letter to Murray which described the Knebworth conversation, he said, "Sir E. Lytton is sound in his political creed,—especially as to the Church, which he would uphold at all hazards. He is, however, bound up with his party, and it would be rash at the present stage to put the Review into his hands." There was not the same objection to his undertaking other topics, and he made a promise, which he afterwards fulfilled, of contributing a literary article. "I am not afraid," Elwin wrote to Murray, "that he would give us hasty effusions. He dislikes writing in a hurry, and tries on all occasions to do his best. He will do us good service upon some subjects."<sup>2</sup>

Several other guests were staying at Knebworth at the same time as Whitwell Elwin, and the part of the visit that he really enjoyed was not its business, but its social side. Of this he put down some pleasant recollections, in letters and memoranda, in which he made no allusion to politics. The following extracts give the most interesting portion of these notes.

"Sir E. Lytton is quiet and graceful in his manners. He paid us just enough attention to make us feel that we were welcome, and not so much as to encroach on our independence. His deafness prevented his hearing most of what was said in general conversation, and he

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, May, 1855.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Aug. 1, 1854.



accordingly took little part in it, but when he was addressed personally he talked freely and abundantly. Though he has a wide sweep of knowledge, and speaks intelligently and sensibly, there was nothing particularly striking, either in the matter or manner of his conversation. On the other hand there was no effort. It was simple and natural, and therefore agreeable. Whatever may be the amount of his powers, I should never have guessed that they were those of the novelist, for he does not appear observant of character, and his mode of talking is not the least dramatic. When he was speaking of his novels, I remarked that the last two (*The Caxtons* and *My Novel*) had been more popular than any. The reason was, he replied, that they dealt in more pleasing impressions than his previous tales. But they exhibited, he said, less power than some of their predecessors,—*Lucretia*, for instance,—which everybody disliked because the passions depicted were disagreeable. The popularity of his drama, *The Lady of Lyons*, arose from its being pleasing. The public opinion, he thought, was mainly influenced by this single circumstance. An author's notions of his own works are always interesting, and in this instance the criticism appears to be just.

“Landseer, who was among the guests, is a short and rather ordinary looking person. Without being in the least witty, he is full of vivacity, tells some humorous stories, and is on the whole entertaining. If his conversation had a little more body, it would be delightful.<sup>1</sup> Besides the interest which belongs to him as the greatest painter in one department of art that ever lived, he has a particular love for dogs (always a bond of sympathy

<sup>1</sup> Thackeray said to Whitwell Elwin, in 1857, “Landseer is pleasant company. I went about Paris with him, and it was delightful. He had such a bright eye for all he saw.”

with me), and an intimate knowledge of their habits. A dog, he said with perfect truth, is never so happy as when you give him something to do for you. He once threw an old kettle into the sea, for his retriever to fetch it out. When the dog seized it, a wave washed it over his head, which prevented his seeing, and he swam away from the shore instead of towards it. Landseer watched him till he was lost in the distance. He was then recovering from the effects of a brain fever, was nervous and melancholy, and the loss of his dog made him singularly wretched. He spent the rest of the day on his sofa in sadness, but late in the evening, after an interval of hours, the animal, swelled to an immense size, came trotting in with the kettle in his mouth. It is supposed that at last it got detached from his head, and he discovered that he was steering in the wrong direction. But the admirable trait is that he would not abandon the kettle, which was a commission from his master, despite the fearful struggle he must have had even to preserve his life.

“He told us an amusing speech of the King of Portugal, when he was presented to him the other day. The king is a youth of seventeen, fond of Natural History, and speaks English well enough in the main, but, like all persons who talk by grammar and dictionary, occasionally uses words in an equivocal sense. His speech to Landseer was an instance. ‘I am so glad to make your acquaintance, Sir Landseer, I am so fond of *beasts*.’ But what he thought the greatest compliment he ever received was that a dog-seller, whom he accosted in London with a terrier under each arm, replied, upon his remarking that their ears were not cropped, ‘Landseer, sir, says they ought not to be.’

“Another great modern painter, Maclise, was among the guests. He is a fine, manly looking person, and as manly in mind as in appearance, but modest and retiring

withal. In general, he says, the best days of the artist are over while the man himself is still in his prime. The first picture he paints through spectacles—and the majority of persons begin to grow short-sighted at about forty—shows that he sees neither form nor colour as he saw them before. The eye of good painters is so nicely correct that they instantly detect these shortcomings in their brethren. 'I watch,' said Maclise, 'for the inevitable hour, and know that for me it cannot be long deferred.' He made the confession in the tone of a man, but it sounded sad to my ears."

Although Elwin had not felt such absolute confidence in Bulwer Lytton as to commit the politics of the Quarterly to his guidance, he continued for some time to look upon him as the man who had the best chance of extricating his party from its disorganised condition. In the session of 1855 he considered him to be the only Member of Parliament of any note who had increased his reputation. Elwin wrote to him, in the summer, to encourage him in maintaining his rising position. He said, "In difficult circumstances the people like leaders who seem to have confidence in themselves, who speak as if they had definite notions, and saw their own way out of the crisis. The Conservative party have a great advantage, as representing in an especial degree the feelings of the aristocracy and gentlemen of the country. If they had a leader who would act in a spirit of high honour, and take a tone such as seemed to befit the persons he represented, showing himself ready at the same time to put wrong right, I cannot doubt that they would speedily become as powerful as ever. I think you are ultimately destined to discharge this office for them."<sup>1</sup>

It soon, however, became apparent that this was not to

<sup>1</sup> To Sir E. Bulwer Lytton, July 21, 1855.



be, and then Elwin turned his hopes upon Gladstone, who, in 1856, was hovering between parties, uncertain where to fix his allegiance. While he was in this unsettled state of mind, he wrote to Murray, July 13, to ask whether a review of the past session from his pen would be acceptable for the Quarterly. The editor, being wary, suggested very explicit inquiries as to Gladstone's design,—“for,” he said to Murray, “his views are so dark and vague that I fear he may have some covert end which we should entirely disapprove.”<sup>1</sup> Several letters passed, in which Gladstone avoided committing himself; but, so far as his article went, he expressed himself satisfactorily, and his offer was accepted. His subject was, “The declining efficiency of Parliament,” and his object was “to illustrate the evils arising from the disorganised state of parties.”<sup>2</sup> “The crippled and disorganised state of the Conservative party in the House of Commons,” he said, however, “is a main part of the evil, and a part which cannot properly be laid bare by me, nor perhaps by anyone in the Quarterly.”<sup>3</sup> Consequently, he felt the delicacy of the task he had undertaken, and when the manuscript was finished, he wrote to the editor: “I have felt that my best course was to offer you the paper to do what you might think best with it. If, therefore, when you consult your coadjutors, you find it to be their opinion, and make it your own, that the paper as it stands is inadmissible, or that it requires material change of the kind which I could not make, I beg you to remember that, notwithstanding your last letter, you are under no engagement to me, but may, if you think fit, cast it anew, retaining, adding, or excluding, as you may deem prudent; in which case I should of course cease to be responsible for

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Aug. 7, 1856.

<sup>2</sup> Gladstone to Murray, July 13, 1856.

<sup>3</sup> Gladstone to Elwin, Sept. 28, 1856.

the paper in any degree ; but a great part of my purpose would be answered, that purpose being to see a powerful organ like the *Quarterly* employ itself, in some sense or other, with a view to dispelling the apathy which prevails, and stirring men up to make some better provision than now exists for keeping straight the course of the Government, and taking care that the business of the country really shall be done."<sup>1</sup>

In accordance with the permission thus given, some slight modifications were made in the article, but none of a material character. In the main, the editor entirely concurred in the opinions expressed by Gladstone. This interchange of views was the foundation of their acquaintance, and each was pleased with the other. "I am much gratified," Gladstone wrote to Elwin, "to find how much we are agreed as to the present position of public affairs."<sup>2</sup> "No one had a greater mistrust of him," Elwin wrote to Murray, "than I had myself, for I could not guess to what port he was bound—the Whig, the Radical, or the Conservative. My sole hope for him is founded on the creed which he has now for the first time put forth." But he added, "It must be admitted that there are points of capital importance on which he has not spoken out, and which must be cleared up before the party can contract any compact with him."<sup>3</sup>

Gladstone's demonstration of the misfortune of disunion in the Conservative ranks involved the corollary that they lacked a strong enough guide to bring them together. "They want leaders and mutual confidence," wrote Elwin, in commenting on the article, "and until some able general puts himself at their head they will continue weak

<sup>1</sup> Gladstone to Elwin, Oct. 2, 1856.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Oct. 11, 1856.

<sup>3</sup> To Murray, Oct. 22, 1856.

and divided.”<sup>1</sup> This, too, was the talk of the political clubs, when they discussed the paper, as the editor learnt from Robert Dundas, a brother of Lord Melville’s, whom he met shortly after at Apethorpe, and on whom he was impressing the importance of reuniting the dislocated Conservative party. “But,” said Dundas, not knowing who was the author of the article, “they are nearly all agreed this can only be done by Gladstone. He alone is capable of leading them. His crotchets do not stand in the way. He would soon give them up when he had to carry his followers along with him. The difficulty is Disraeli, for they don’t know how to get rid of him.”<sup>2</sup>

The conversation set Elwin’s mind upon endeavouring to bring together Gladstone and the Conservatives. “Gladstone,” he wrote to Murray, “is extremely anxious to get out of his present neutral position. I wish I knew how to bring him and the Conservative party into some direct negotiations, for if they do not take him while he is to be had, there is a danger that they may lose him. I am convinced that, with the checks imposed by the necessity for conciliating his supporters, he would be a safe man. His vagaries are nine-tenths of them the result of his isolation. A word or two at this time would, I believe, bring about a coalition.”<sup>3</sup> At last, with Gladstone’s permission, and apparently at Lord Brougham’s suggestion, he took advantage of his position as editor of the *Quarterly Review*, to write to Lord Derby, who was then the leader of the Conservatives, to suggest the possibility of a reconciliation. Lord Derby doubted whether Gladstone would shake off his Peelite connections, but, if he would, expressed his readiness to welcome his adherence.<sup>4</sup> Gladstone,

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Oct. 18, 1856.

<sup>2</sup> Elwin to Murray, Nov. 4, 1856.

<sup>3</sup> The same, Nov. 10, 1856.

<sup>4</sup> The Earl of Derby to Elwin, Nov. 26, 1856.



on his part, was prepared to receive an advance from Lord Derby. Neither, however, would take the initiative of making a direct communication to the other.<sup>1</sup> Thus the opportunity passed away, and the chance of Gladstone becoming a Conservative soon receded into the distance.

Whitwell Elwin endeavoured to follow the same independent line on Church questions as on politics, in the *Review*. He was anxious to improve its position as a religious influence. "I have thought much," he wrote to Murray, at the beginning of his work, "of what we ought to do in the Q. R. on matters theological, and have a full confidence that, without renewing controversies, which are now happily lulled, we can appeal more largely than has been lately done to the sympathies of the clergy."<sup>2</sup> He therefore endeavoured to obtain papers which would promote the general cause of the Gospel, without meddling with disputes. "There must be a toleration of different opinions within the Establishment," he said, "or there could be no Establishment at all."<sup>3</sup> "I am not friendly," he said again, "as a rule, to religious controversy, and least of all to that part of it which is carried on between different sections within the Church itself. Religion has been the solace of my own life, and my sole object on this head is to publish what will aid the cause, and be a comfort and assistance to the Christian world."<sup>4</sup> He was not, however, disposed to carry his toleration to all lengths. "There must," he said, "be a line drawn somewhere."<sup>5</sup> He drew it when Stanley wanted to advocate latitudinarian ideas in the *Review*. The editor admired Stanley personally. He had stayed at Booton for three days, in October, 1854, preaching there on Sunday

<sup>1</sup> Gladstone to Elwin, Dec. 13, 1856; the Earl of Derby to Elwin, Jan. 7, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, Nov. 5, 1853.

<sup>4</sup> The same, Dec. 7, 1855.

<sup>3</sup> The same, Dec. 3, 1853.

<sup>5</sup> The same, Dec. 3, 1855.

the 15th. "Fanny," he wrote, of his wife, "was surprised to see him so little and so prim. The children were amused with his short trousers, and large shoes which threatened every step he took to drop from his feet. Fanny was pleased with him. She liked his knowledge, his good sense, his simplicity, his benevolence, his uprightness. Altogether he is, as she says, a very odd, good, little man."<sup>1</sup> "You never know a man well," he wrote to Murray, "till he sits at your fireside, or you at his. What we saw in this manner of A. Stanley, when he was here, left a most favourable impression. He is one of the best men—I mean as to goodness—that I ever met with."<sup>2</sup> But liking the man did not mean liking his opinions, and he resolutely stood out against his airing them in the Quarterly. Nevertheless an unsound bias was detected in Stanley's contributions, and commented on to Murray, who thought that more care must be exercised in order to avoid imputations on the orthodoxy of the Review. "You are quite right," replied the editor, "we *must* be very cautious of A. Stanley. He endeavours to keep back his views where they clash with mine, but when a man holds strong opinions they *will* ooze out, and no vigilance can prevent it. The upshot is that I must keep him from meddling with modern theology. At present I have got him upon Mahomet, in which his Eastern knowledge will turn to account. The ground here is safe, unless his toleration extends even to Mahometans."<sup>3</sup>

"I am," Elwin continued, in the same letter, "seriously pondering an article which, without touching upon high church or low church, will put our orthodoxy out of question. In the meantime I authorise you to say em-

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Oct. 24, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, Oct. 26, 1854.

<sup>3</sup> The same, Sept. 21, 1855.

phatically from me to whomever you may think it expedient, that I do not hold any of the opinions of Maurice, Arnold, or Thirlwall, that have been generally considered objectionable,—that on the contrary they have no more earnest opponent, and that I have *systematically* refused to lend the Review to the promulgation of their doctrines. It is true in the moral, as in the physical world, that action and reaction are equal and contrary. One extreme party begets another. The ultra-tractarians were ultra-intolerant. They energetically enforced their sentiments in pulpits, newspapers, reviews, and tracts. They got a certain ascendancy, and this provoked the opposition of another set who know no bounds to their sympathies, who would break down all distinctions, and have Christians and heretics join hand in hand in the same monster circle. This is the party which is now in its turn labouring for supremacy. It will make little way, or it would be the *most* dangerous party that ever rose.”

The article was never written. Indeed it would have taxed the editorial ingenuity to construct an essay which would establish an orthodox platform, without treading on any dangerous high or low church ground. The scheme, however, expressed the principle which at first guided his selection of papers. It gave the Review a character for moderation, but also for indefiniteness, and made its religious articles heavier and less attractive than if he had handled some of the subjects which excited the feelings of partisans.

Even on subjects where there was less reason for not taking a side, Elwin was averse to going into the arena of passing disputes. Some he considered were served best by silence. “It would,” he said, “be an endless task to correct all the obscure misstatements which are put forth throughout the length and breadth of the land. The



refutation would not only do no good, it would be positively mischievous, by giving importance to transitory heresies, and fanning into life what, in all probability, is already forgotten.”<sup>1</sup> When his attention was called to the opinions of a certain obscure writer, he said, “Nobody that I know of troubles his head about his lucubrations, and it would be a dull and useless undertaking to set up a dead man for the satisfaction of knocking him down again. He had better be left to lie where he is.”

It was a result of his policy of moderation that the subjects which excited the public mind were not very fully noticed in the Review. “I should be glad,” he said, “to introduce more topics of the day, but the difficulty seems to me to be that the majority of them are topics of the day and nothing more. They are dead and gone before the end of the quarter.”<sup>2</sup> He would not treat the Quarterly as if it was on no higher level than a newspaper. Whatever popularity it had under his editorship, was in no way due to the characteristics peculiar to journalistic literature. He aimed at something higher. His purpose was to maintain its best traditions as a publication of substantial contributions to knowledge.

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, April 22, 1856.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Aug. 7, 1856.

## CHAPTER VI

1854-1858

### LITERARY EDITING AND WRITING FOR THE QUARTERLY REVIEW

MURRAY paid the editor of the Quarterly Review £1,000 a year, in addition to anything to which he might be entitled by writing articles himself. The usual rate of payment was a guinea a page, but the publisher very generously increased this sum to the more eminent authors, and did so regularly to Whitwell Elwin, giving him after a time as much as £100 for each of his contributions, irrespective of their length. The editorship, therefore, put him into easy circumstances. It also brought him into connection with a great number of notable persons. These things, however, had no special attraction for Elwin. His increased income did not make him alter his simple mode of living, and though he liked people, he disliked society, as such. Moreover editorial drudgery was uncongenial to him, and therefore, on the whole, the pleasures of the office were more than counter-balanced by the discomforts. He almost always regarded it in the light of a burden. He had found it pleasant enough when he was only Lockhart's deputy. It was a very different matter to be the responsible head, year in and year out. Consequently, while he had been glad to accept the temporary charge, he never voluntarily held the permanent post. "I merely undertook," he wrote to

Lady Westmorland, in 1857, "to manage it for a number or two when poor Lockhart was ill, and I have never been able to get rid of it since. My happiness is in my parish, my home, and my friends, and in so far as my personal feelings are concerned I am a loser by whatever mixes me up with the turmoil of spirits more restless than my own."

Many of his natural tastes were not adapted for the work of an editor. He preferred reading to writing. "I doubt," he said, "if any that ever used their pen at all had less care about their little effusions than I have."<sup>1</sup> It fretted him also to have to get productions ready by fixed dates, often at the cost of devoting all his hours for a time to the one employment. "It is a melancholy truth," he wrote, as a quarter was coming to an end, in 1856, "that what little sense I possess I am obliged to send to the printer."<sup>2</sup> This would not have been necessary if he had distributed his labours on a systematic plan. On his method he did too little at one time, which obliged him to do too much at another. When the time was drawing near for the publication of a number he was almost always in arrears. But he was endowed with uncommon vigour of mind and body, and when the case became urgent he roused himself to immense energy. He then wrote all the day and often far into the night. "At the close of the quarter," he said, "I have hardly time to eat or sleep."<sup>3</sup> His spirits rose with the excitement of these periods of high pressure. "I never was in better health or happiness," he wrote to Murray, as the number for October, 1854, was in hand, "though for the last three weeks I have sat at my desk from half-past

<sup>1</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, Jan. 14, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Dec. 20, 1856.

<sup>3</sup> The same, April 8, 1858.



five in the morning till between twelve and one at night.”<sup>1</sup> “The editor is never so well or so happy,” his wife wrote, “as when he is most busy. If you could only see him in the first month of the quarter and in the last, you would wish that every month was the last month.”<sup>2</sup>

When the proper date for publishing was due, and often overdue, his habit was to go up to London for about ten days, to be on the spot as the number was finally printing off. The chances were that some of the papers were still in manuscript, others quite unrevised, and most of the proofs uncorrected. He used to stay at the Old Hummums Hotel in Covent Garden Market, where he would, at times, shut himself up in his bedroom to write. Otherwise he was at the hotel very little except for the nights, and of these he spent quite as much in attending to his proofs as in sleeping. He had, however, to abandon this night work after a year or two, finding the strain of it excessive. Once he wrote a whole article, to supply an unexpected deficiency, in the public coffee-room of the hotel, at a few long sittings. All his day, during these London visits, was spent on Review business at Albemarle Street, or in a hasty round of calls—his proofs carried in his pocket, and revised in the houses of friends as occasion offered. In the methodical home of the Murrays, “Mr. Elwin must have been here to-day,” was a saying among the children, when they found the writing-table disordered, and the pen stuck in the ink-bottle, as he always left it. The rush was prolonged till there was scarcely time to dress hurriedly for dinner at night. “My London history,” he once said, “is summed up in a single sentence—Work, work, work all day, and dine, dine, dine every evening.”<sup>3</sup> “Every

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Sept. 25, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Elwin to Murray, Jan. 5, 1857.

<sup>3</sup> To Miss Holley, Jan. 16, 1860.

step you take in the throng involves you here in something which obliges you to take a fresh step, and so it goes on without end.”<sup>1</sup>

Through it all he was, as a rule, in high spirits. But he was nevertheless yearning to get home, and directly the Review work was done, he made for the railway station, sometimes irrespective of whether he still had engagements in town or not. “The gaiety of the place,” he said, “has no charm for me. On the contrary, it makes me sad. I turn from it with haste whenever I can.”<sup>2</sup> Murray offered him £200 a year more if he would come up and live in London. It would have been an advantage to the Review, but he would not hear of it. Much as he delighted in seeing friends and talking with people, while he was engaged in it, he was repelled by the town life, with its stifling surroundings. He wrote to Lady Westmorland in the summer of 1857, with reference to a remark made by her daughter, “I agree with Lady Rose that to spend this season in London is a positive sin. I remember her observation every day when I am enjoying the green fields and the fresh air, and I enjoy them all the more from reflecting on the contrast between town and country.”<sup>3</sup> “Fresh air, and green fields and quiet,” he said again, “are luxuries enough after London.” Thackeray had a few days before expressed his pleasure at the beauty of the trees just outside Norwich, where he was lecturing in May, 1857. “Ha!” he said, “one must live in London to appreciate this.” “No,” replied Elwin, “it is only those who live in the country who know how to enjoy it.” “How so?” asked Thackeray. “Because,” said he, “it is a thing the more you have of it, the more you appre-

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Feb. 26, 1856.

<sup>2</sup> Letter, June 30, 1854.

<sup>3</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, June 12, 1857.

ciate it.”<sup>1</sup> He always pined for it when he was away. “I am at home again in peace,” he wrote after one of his visits to town, “away from the turmoil of London, which is always hateful to me.”<sup>2</sup>

It was inevitable that after some six weeks of exhausting life at the end of the quarter, there should be a reaction when he got back to the seclusion of Booton, with the Review off his hands for the moment. “I never return from London,” he said, “but I am laid up with a sort of fever, the result, I fancy, of the excitement, late hours, and high living, of that horrible Babel.”<sup>3</sup> The illness produced a lassitude, disabling him from beginning literary tasks again immediately. “I do not care for pain,” he remarked once when he was poorly, “but cannot brace up my mind to work under it like Walter Scott, Layard, and a few other heroic spirits.”<sup>4</sup> Inevitably, therefore, the next number was partially neglected until the quarter was once more wearing away, and a repetition of the same impetuous effort became necessary for its preparation.

A Review conducted in this spasmodic alternation of high and low spirits, of languor and exhilaration, was sure to have weak as well as strong points. But the success of the Quarterly under Whitwell Elwin’s direction was evidence of the strength of his editorship. Even at this distance of time a considerable proportion of the articles can be read with interest, and this was chiefly owing to his personal exertions in finding contributors and in making their contributions readable.

Ostensibly, of course, the Quarterly Review was a “review” of books. A review, however, which simply dished up the materials of another person’s volume, with a running commentary on its contents, had no attraction

<sup>1</sup> MS. Memorandum by Mrs. Elwin.

<sup>2</sup> Letter, Oct. 20, 1858.

<sup>3</sup> Jan. 26, 1855.

<sup>4</sup> To Miss Holley, Jan. 7, 1854.



for Elwin. Indeed the principal Quarterlies had long aimed at something more substantial than this. A large proportion of their pages had consisted of original essays on definite subjects. Gifford had raised the Quarterly Review to its highest point in this respect, and Elwin endeavoured to make it what it had been at its best. At no time of its previous career was it less a mere Review of books than under him. In conformity with custom their titles were put at the head of the articles, but as often as not this was a mere form. Sometimes papers were written before the work which they were eventually to "review" had been thought about, and the editor was occasionally left to discover, as best he could, some appropriate publication that would satisfy the artificial requirement. Lockhart had himself acted on this plan, though he did not carry it quite so far as Gifford had done or as his successor did. When he was urging Elwin, in early days, to take any subject he fancied, he wrote to him, "In peering for a peg, remember that a very slender peg is, in my eyes, sufficient. Sydney Smith made no bones of inventing his now and then. He once created a furious demand for a reprint of a legal treatise, which treatise had no existence."<sup>1</sup> Elwin did not invent his pegs, but he often hung nothing upon them. In his own essays, even if the selected work happened to be the main authority on which his paper was based, he scarcely ever reviewed it in any proper sense of the word. Strictly as a reviewer, he scarcely excelled. He rarely wrote about the book itself, beyond devoting to it a preliminary paragraph which had no particular connection with the rest of the article. He always intended, if he reprinted his essays, to drop these prefatory notices, as irrelevant to the subject

<sup>1</sup> Lockhart to Elwin, April 4, 1850.

in any other setting than that of the pages of the Review.<sup>1</sup>

Like most editors, Elwin began with a vision of excellent topics and excellent authors. If neither was easy to find separately, the difficulty of finding them in combination was greater. It was a problem inherent to every undertaking of the kind. The number of persons who are gifted with literary ability must always be small, to which must be added that there are few feats of the pen more difficult than to make an essay of limited length, on a solid theme, at once interesting and instructive. The ablest writers and eminent specialists on particular subjects, as a rule, have not time for skilled condensation. Hence it had been a common complaint about the Quarterly, as of other reviews, that it was dull. "The Quarterly Review," wrote Southey, in 1825, "has been overlaid with statistics, as it was once with Greek criticism. It is the disease of the age—the way in which verbose dullness spends itself. The journal wants more of the *literæ humaniores*."<sup>2</sup> The evil had recurred in some shape over and over again, and had grown serious as Lockhart's vigour declined. Elwin's determination to correct it was undaunted by the perplexity of the task. While he was still acting nominally as Lockhart's deputy, he wrote to Murray, "I have been bestowing every instant upon the attempt to make silk purses out of sows' ears. I am, perhaps, too venturesome in rejecting heavy articles, but it is so essential to the permanent improvement of the Review that we should have more cork and less lead, that I am resolved to hold out. A little temporary inconvenience or delay in any given quarter may be of

<sup>1</sup> This intention has been carried out in reprinting the Essays in these volumes.

<sup>2</sup> Southey to J. T. Coleridge, Jan. 30, 1825; Southey's *Life and Correspondence*, vol. v. p. 202.

itself an evil, but it is inseparable from a transition state, and is not to be set against the advantage of getting a class of contributions more in accordance with the public taste. Bulwer<sup>1</sup> told me that his grand difficulty, when he edited the *New Monthly Magazine*, was to find *readable* matter, and after remarking that the last Q. R. deserved that epithet, pressed very strongly upon me the wisdom of persevering in this course."<sup>2</sup>

Even when the materials were good, it was not easy to secure their intelligent treatment. "I have now," Elwin wrote to Lord Brougham, in 1855, "seen a little of the sort of preparation which people of many descriptions make for writing. I have known a person write leading articles on nautical affairs who had never been in a vessel, except when he crossed to Boulogne to escape from his creditors, and the same instructor of the people criticised bitterly the operations of agriculturists, though he had passed the whole of his life in London, and barely knew a potato from a turnip."<sup>3</sup> So frequent were errors of fact in articles proffered by contributors that Elwin found it absolutely necessary to study the subjects himself, in order to guard the *Review* from ignorant mistakes. This added enormously to the editorial work. When, with much pains, good and accurate matter had been obtained, there remained the literary composition to be brought up to the requisite standard, and this was not easier than the rest. It was all very well to start by saying, "There is but one way—to compel every contributor to write up to the mark, or to decline his contributions." In the very same letter he had to admit, "The art of writing pure English is almost lost."<sup>4</sup> It could not be secured even in quarters where it might

<sup>1</sup> Sir E. Bulwer Lytton.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, Aug. 18, 1854.

<sup>3</sup> To Lord Brougham, Sept. 27, 1855.

<sup>4</sup> To Murray, Jan. 31, 1854.



be most expected. It was uncommon among physicians, whose scientific information he would otherwise have specially welcomed. "Of the three great professions," he said, "medical men as a class are by far the worst *writers*. It is rare to meet with one of their authors who has any idea of what style is."<sup>1</sup> "I could make a much,—a very much better bill of fare," he said, after some experience of editing, "if I could pick the subjects, and ask particular writers to treat them; but this, in most cases, is to pledge yourself to accept the article, and few persons can be sufficiently trusted with such a commission. It is surprising how numerous the failures are even among authors of some sort of note."<sup>2</sup> "Oh!" he cried to Murray, "for a few clever young fellows! What a Review you might have! Dickens read through *nine hundred* contributions to Household Words, of which *eleven* were available after being entirely rewritten."<sup>3</sup> The literary incapacity of his contributors gave Elwin more trouble than anything else. "I have not only my own work to do at this period of the quarter," he wrote to Lady Westmorland, a little before a number was coming out, "but the work of everybody else. Most of the articles come in at the close, and it is a strict fact that I rewrite three out of every four in the proof. There is rarely one entire line left as it comes. This has been the practice of every editor of the Q. R., and experience soon convinces you of the necessity. There are plenty of people who have knowledge, but very few who can express it in even producible language." An eminent scientist had written a paper on his own special study. "But," wrote the editor, "the phraseology was positively bar-

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Oct. 25, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Aug. 7, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> The same, Feb. 8, 1854.

barous. I have already altered every line of it, and it is not yet in a fit state for the public."<sup>1</sup>

The traditions of the Review gave the editor an unlimited right to revise contributions. Gifford had used it with an unsparing hand. Southey, though he resented the process on his own articles, was obliged to yield to it. "You wonder," he wrote to his friend Hill, "that I should submit to any expurgations in the Quarterly. The fact is that there must be a power expurgatory in the hands of the editor; and the misfortune is that editors frequently think it incumbent on them to use that power merely because they have it."<sup>2</sup> He welcomed the prospect of John Taylor Coleridge becoming editor, because his own papers would be "no longer liable to capricious mutilations";<sup>3</sup> and, in 1824, when Gifford's resignation was imminent, he claimed exemption, but only on the grounds of his personal position. "No future editor," he wrote to Murray, "be he who he may, must expect to exercise the same discretion over my papers which Mr. Gifford has done. . . . My age and (I may add without arrogance) the rank which I hold in literature entitle me to say that I will never again write under the correction of anyone."<sup>4</sup> Croker, whose long service warranted at least as much consideration as Southey's, yet considered, as has been seen, that the editor must have absolute freedom to correct even his productions. Lockhart had altered little less than Gifford, and equally without compunction, except in Croker's case. Trained

<sup>1</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, Dec. 20, 1856.

<sup>2</sup> Southey to the Rev. Herbert Hill, Feb. 1, 1813; *Life and Correspondence*, vol. iv. p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Southey to J. Rickman, Dec. 26, 1824; *Selections from the Letters of R. Southey*, vol. iii. p. 456.

<sup>4</sup> Southey to Murray, Oct. 25, 1824; Smiles's *Memoir of John Murray*, vol. ii. p. 160.

in the editing of the Quarterly by Lockhart, and as fastidious in literary taste as Gifford himself, Elwin was not behind either in the extent of his revisions. Of a particular number of the Review—and it was only an illustration of his common habit—he told Murray that he had written “entirely, several pages” of one paper, “and considerably altered the rest.” He had “added to, abridged, changed the arrangement, and polished, or attempted to polish, the style” of another, “till,” he said, “it cost me more trouble than if I had written the whole myself.” “At least six pages” of another were his “own writing, and the rest has for the most part been changed in arrangement, condensed, interpolated, and nearly every line touched.” Of another, he said, “I added very little, but I as good as rewrote it.” There were only three articles in the number that had not given him much labour, but of these three all, except one, “received a fair amount of revision.”<sup>1</sup> No one, however eminent, escaped wholly, and with the lesser lights the process was constantly drastic.

“I do not willingly make changes in the articles,” he wrote to Murray, when he was commencing his editorial work, “but if they were allowed to go in as the authors leave them the Review would expire in a twelvemonth.”<sup>2</sup> Necessary as the revision might be, it was inevitable that offence should sometimes be taken when it was on a wholesale scale. The editor himself said once, “I have carried it beyond what could reasonably be expected, and I only wonder the contributors have borne it with so much good humour.”<sup>3</sup> The good humour could not, however, be always preserved, especially when authors were not consulted or informed as to the altera-

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, 1859.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Sept. 24, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> The same, Jan. 29, 1859.



tions that were being made in their work. "I was much annoyed," wrote one who had suffered severely from the editorial knife, "to find the mutilation of my article, and the omission of what I considered the plum of the pudding. . . . I think you should allow contributors to speak their own mind in their own style, unless flagrantly bad. It seems to me that a little irregular individuality of opinion and expression is better than a uniform and tame correctness." One writer angrily returned the cheque for his paper, saying that the article which had appeared in the Review was not his at all, and that he would not be paid for what he had not written. Perhaps the process was carried too far. The theory was that, as the Review was responsible for its unsigned contents, the editor could make whatever changes would be for its benefit. Indeed Elwin learnt to prefer "an inferior article received in time, with ample leisure for revision," to "a superior one printed and corrected in haste,"<sup>1</sup> without material alterations. Whatever the gain might be from correction, it may, however, reasonably be contended that when revision amounts to a recasting of a writer's materials and language, he should at least have the opportunity of withdrawing his wares, and offering them in some other market. This was a privilege which Elwin sometimes allowed, but generally only when he wanted to get rid of a paper which he had more or less committed himself to accept.

The editor of the Edinburgh Review was at that time Mr., afterwards Sir George, Cornewall Lewis. On January 8th, 1855, Elwin met him at a dinner-party. "I sat next him," he wrote, "and we had a long conversation upon the duties and difficulties of our office. To my astonishment he told me that he curtails articles, but does not *alter*

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, April 13, 1854.

them,—at least not extensively. He asked me if I kept many articles in print. ‘I did,’ he said, ‘at first, because I was told it was Lockhart’s habit. But I have given it up, for I found that after I had accepted an article, and printed it, and kept it some time, the author felt aggrieved at my ultimately refusing it. What do you do in such circumstances?’ I answered that they were circumstances to which I was a stranger, because I was not in the habit of accepting, printing, keeping, and then finally rejecting. It is wonderful to me that he can coolly perpetrate such injustice, but he seemed to think that the refractory contributor was an unreasonable person, who, if he had possessed any sense of propriety, would have taken back his article with a submissive bow.”<sup>1</sup> Elwin did, however, occasionally find it necessary to reject articles after they were in print, for he would have matter set up, which was quite unpresentable as it stood, in the hope of being able to get it into shape in the proof. Now and then the task baffled him, but never from any scruple, such as Lewis had, in making extensive alterations.

The picked men were, as a rule, too busy not only to give their best, but also to get it done by a specified time. “The difficulty is,” the editor found, “to keep those who *can* write to their work. The mediocrity men are forward enough: the others require incessant spurring, and *will* take till the last moment.”<sup>2</sup> When their essays did come in, they were invariably too long. Elwin’s comment on one of his contributors was, “He appears to have forgotten that he was not to have a whole number to himself.”<sup>3</sup> “The public,” he said, “cry out against long articles. People expect in a review small dishes and savoury. When they are inclined for a *pièce de résistance*

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Jan. 14, 1855.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, Aug. 28, 1855.

<sup>3</sup> The same, 1854.

they go to a book. I am a great lover of completeness myself, but I act as taster for our many-headed master, and am obliged to consult his palate. Long essays are as little relished by the public as long sermons."<sup>1</sup> Yet condensation was almost as irritating to writers as correction. Southey complained, "In one thing all editors are alike: they cut and mangle the papers of their contributors, in order to bring them within the number of pages which it suits their arrangement for the number to afford, just as the Russians are said to fit old pictures to ready-made frames by cutting them."<sup>2</sup> Elwin, in this respect, was at least no worse an offender than the rest of his fraternity, for he allowed a greater length than was customary in most reviews, whenever an author really had something to tell, and could tell it in a fairly interesting manner.

If a writer had talent, Elwin was quick to detect it, though it might lie disguised under literary defects. He would then take infinite pains to show how what was unsuitable as it stood, could be made serviceable by improvements. Both while he was editor and afterwards, he thus put beginners in the way of rendering their own compositions suitable for acceptance. Now and then his kindly hints fell unfortunately. In returning an essay proffered by a university professor, with whose name and position he happened not to be familiar, he told him that his paper showed abilities, which would enable him to write very well, if he would be at the pains to mend certain faults which he proceeded to specify. The learned professor did not appreciate the advice.

The business part of the editorial duties was what galled Elwin most in the work. He had no particular method of dealing with it, which meant that it was only

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Nov. 12, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> *Selections from the Letters of R. Southey*, vol. iv. p. 3.



dealt with when necessity compelled him to grapple with its accumulations. This was especially the case with the correspondence. And when to Review communications were added those of multitudinous acquaintances, he became more and more deeply enveloped in arrears. "Every day," he said, in 1857, "is eaten up by the eternal correspondence and petty interruptions which make up modern life. The present Lord Hertford says that a man is a fool if he answers a letter, for the only consequence will be that he will have to answer a second. Gladstone told me that when he started in the world no one could be more methodical, but that he had given up replying to those who wrote to him, from finding that if he discharged this duty he must neglect every other. I begin to be of his and Lord Hertford's opinion. The worst is that many correspondents *must* be answered, and these alone fill up a large part of the day."<sup>1</sup>

Theoretically, he gave up the beginning of the afternoon to this part of his avocations. But since, when he was engaged on any literary work, he rarely broke it off before two, and then liked to sit long over a midday dinner, these three hours evaporated except at times of pressure. The result was inevitable. "My correspondence," he wrote, in 1860, "is a growing evil. The bag comes so stuffed with letters that it is often not easy to pull them out. Numbers go unanswered, for the day is not long enough to reply to all."<sup>2</sup> A portion of them were probably expostulations at not having received some desired communication. Being unable to deal with them, he constantly put off opening them. So they lay, sometimes for days and weeks, till they became submerged in the chaos of the dining-room mantelpiece or the study table. It was vain to write to

<sup>1</sup> Letter, Aug. 12, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> To Miss Holley, Jan. 23, 1860.

call his attention to the fact, for the chance was that the second letter shared the fate of the first, and the editor's peace of mind was secured at the cost of the exasperation of his correspondents. The Bishop of Norwich, his own diocesan, once asked a connection of Elwin's "if there was any post to Booton," because he could get no answer to any of his letters. The irritation caused to Quarterly Review contributors was great.

Nor was the defect confined to correspondence. Articles shared the same lot. Quantities of manuscripts were never opened at all. The unfortunate writers, who often had no second copy, made unavailing appeals for the return of their packets, and the appeal sometimes only went into the unread heap. Then, at last, they would make some irritated complaint to the publisher, and Murray would intervene on their behalf. This would lead to a hunt for the missing manuscript, and generally to the return of others which were brought to light in the process. But it was by no means a certainty that the one particularly wanted would be discovered. When Elwin's editorship came to an end it was said that there were more than twenty that could not be found. Knowing by experience that the mass of proffered contributions were worthless, he sometimes took a humorous pleasure in treating them at their proper value, and, if anyone took the precaution of registering his poor manuscript, would do it up for the post in as flimsy a style as was consistent with any probability of its reaching its destination. On the other hand, however, he would frequently be touched by a tale of poverty, and would send money from his own pocket for an article which he could not insert.

The editor's want of method necessarily drove the Review perpetually into arrears. Very few numbers came

out till after date. Sometimes they were so much behind-hand that the publisher was inundated with remonstrances from the trade, the printers, and the public. When to these were added the complaints of contributors at the neglect of their communications and the cavalier manner in which their productions were treated, Murray would venture on an affectionate expostulation, but not with much effect. There was no one for whom Elwin cared more, or to whose opinions and wishes he would yield so readily; but the fact was he could not do the work in any other way. And it was a striking testimony to the brilliancy of his editorship that, in spite of these defects, the Review, throughout the time he held the reins, was kept at as high a standard as it had ever attained.

If it owed much to his remarkable editing, it owed more to his own papers. His plan was to write an article in every number. He nearly accomplished this, on an average, for he contributed twenty-four independent essays during the seven years he managed the Review. There would have been more if he had not been easily put off from writing. He had made considerable progress with a biography of Richardson, in the autumn of 1855, when a promise from Forster to get him the use of some manuscript materials made him lay it aside for a while,<sup>1</sup> and he rarely returned to anything that he had once put on the shelf. At very short notice he substituted for it his critical essay on Fielding, whom he then regarded as a "favourite author." "I have always said," he remarked, "that the first half of *Tom Jones*—the second is very inferior—is the finest thing in fiction."<sup>2</sup> Of the excellence of his own paper on Fielding he was scarcely aware. In answer to some question about it from Lord Brougham, he replied, "Far from

<sup>1</sup> Elwin to Murray, Dec. 7, 1855.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Dec. 19, 1854.



wishing to bespeak your attention to it I would rather you did not read a word of it. In honest truth I am ashamed of it, for it was struck off with a haste which is only to be excused by that inevitable hurry which is sometimes the lot of all men. The article is unworthy of the subject.”<sup>1</sup> It was not always that discarded attempts were so happily replaced. In the spring of 1856 he had written enough matter for a whole article, on the Causes of the Civil War in England, intending it to act as an introduction to a second paper on the Life of Cromwell. But the single observation from Murray, “We seem a long while in getting to the war,” was enough to make him abandon the scheme.<sup>2</sup> To make criticism easy to the publisher, he had said it would do for “the groundwork of a book,” if it was not suitable for the *Quarterly*,<sup>3</sup> but he really put it on the fire as soon as he saw that Murray did not care for it. Other themes, in like manner, were taken up, but not pursued when some slight impediment checked their natural progress.

Some of his contributions were on miscellaneous subjects. It was not on these, however, admirable as many of them were, that his credit as a writer rests. His exceptional gifts were those of a critic and a biographer. In both veins his abilities were of the first order. In their combination he has rarely been surpassed. It was a kind of writing, too, which was particularly in request. “Biographical sketches,” he told Lady Westmorland, “are more in favour with the public than any other species of article whatever.”<sup>4</sup> “Lockhart,” he wrote, “used to say that literary articles—meaning by that, articles on the Lives and Works of great authors—were the most relished,

<sup>1</sup> To Lord Brougham, Jan. 22, 1856.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, May 20, 1856.

<sup>3</sup> The same, May 26, 1856.

<sup>4</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, Nov. 6, 1856.

and had the most durable value: but he always complained that the craftsmen who could treat that branch were so few in number that it was vain to look for them.”<sup>1</sup> Dean Milman complained that there was not enough of this kind of reading in the Review, to which Elwin replied that he “inserted all the literature he could get which was worth having, and some that was not.”<sup>2</sup>

His conception of what constitutes biography differed entirely from the usage, which was then becoming common, and since then has become commoner, of publishing unwieldy volumes of heterogeneous, undigested materials. “Biography,” he said, “is almost a lost art. It is a living portrait which is wanted, and not a confused heap of particulars that have no significance. The greatest man is only great and peculiar in particular aspects. The largest part of his nature is the common property of humanity. It is a mistake to follow him in a biography through all the circumstances which have in them nothing special. The author should consider, as he goes along, not merely whether a particular incident happened, or whether something was said or done, but whether it is one of those traits or facts or remarks or letters which can have any real importance for the big outside world.”<sup>3</sup> But he greatly valued those minor points which really pictured character. When he was about to write his sketch of Lord Raglan, he wrote to Lady Westmorland, “Dip into your memory, and endeavour to recover the traits which will reproduce him as he appeared in his daily life, and make him live again in our page. What you told me of his kindness to the poor, the sick children, etc., even his dexterity with his left hand in carving, driving, and dealing cards, are particulars full of interest. It is details like

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Oct. 25, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> Elwin to Dr. W. Smith, Dec. 2, 1878.

<sup>3</sup> To Murray, Dec. 18, 1878.

these, not dull and barren generalities, which give a soul to biography."<sup>1</sup>

In searching for personal characteristics, Elwin was careful not to trespass on the privileges of private life. "I was shocked," he said, after reading a memoir, "at the reckless and useless personalities. True or false, they were in any case unbecoming." "No gentleman," he said, again, "violates the confidence which is implied in all social intercourse. There are many things which may be repeated in common talk, but to print them without sanction is against every rule of honour." "He could not mean to behave improperly," he wrote, of one who had dealt freely in unsuitable particularities, "but it is strange that his instincts do not teach him better." Even in questions of character, unless they belonged to a man's public life and works, he held that a writer had no business to drag his subject through the mire. He often expressed amazement at the indiscretion shown by biographers in selecting their materials. "The miserable manner in which lives are now written and private papers edited," he wrote, in an article on Southey, "renders it necessary to speak with plainness upon the demerits of publications which degrade an important department of literature, and injure the reputation of the dead."<sup>2</sup> "It is a pity," he wrote to Murray, "that relatives do not know what is for the real interest of their heroes, and *will* drench the glass of wine with buckets of water."<sup>3</sup> It was his excellent judgment in such matters that enabled him to condense into an article the results of his own minute study of a man's life and acts, so as to give a complete and vivid portraiture of him in a limited number of pages.

<sup>1</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, Nov. 6, 1856.

<sup>2</sup> *Quarterly Review*, vol. xcvi. p. 461.

<sup>3</sup> To Murray, April 25, 1855.



His essays on general topics were pitched in a lower key than his biographical ones. They were, for the most part, written when he was not feeling equal to a more serious exercise, or else to fill a gap at the last moment, or to meet some particular exigence of the times. One or two were prepared to redeem rash promises. In the generous impulse of the moment he would offer friends an article on their works, which, on reflection, did not suggest a suitable scheme to his mind. Now and then they took offence at the apparent neglect. An irritated acquaintance, who had looked in vain, number after number, for a promised notice, wrote, when Elwin alluded to it as in near prospect, "As to what you announce, I really should have thought you did not suppose me such a glutton as to be made a fool of time after time. The process is not so agreeable as to make one wish a repetition of it." Another, who was annoyed at the non-appearance of articles in which he or his friends were concerned, once thought it necessary to decline an invitation to meet Elwin at dinner in order to show that he would not be trifled with. So easy did his writing appear in print that people thought his literary productions could be spun off at will, as from a reel, and if they were disappointed imagined it was from indifference, rather than from any substantial impediment.

There were many points in which Whitwell Elwin resembled his great literary model, Dr. Johnson. "His most excellent works," Boswell wrote, "were struck off at a heat, with rapid exertion."<sup>1</sup> This was the case with all Elwin's finest essays. The month of September, 1855, was well advanced when he wrote to Murray, "I want an article of about two sheets which shall combine entertainment and instruction, and I am working hard to put

<sup>1</sup> Boswell's *Johnson*, Croker's edition, p. 16.

one on paper which I have long had in my head, viz. that on Arago's Biographies." Accordingly he dashed it off for the October number, including in it a delightfully fresh sketch of Ampère, whose story, he said, "from its intrinsic singularity, is as interesting as a romance."<sup>1</sup> In the middle of December of the same year he had not put on paper a single word of his notice of Fielding which appeared in January. It was approximately the end of March when he embarked on an article upon Southey for the number then due. His writing of the article on Lord Raglan, in December, 1856, was delayed by an accident. He had fallen against an iron gate in the dark, and a spike had pierced his knee, which was so painful that he "could do little with original composition." The task was therefore crowded into the last days of the year. He was anxious to contribute a paper on Sir Charles Napier to the same number, and wrote to Murray that he should "want but three days to write it," if he "would not mind that extent of delay." He did, in fact, take a little more, but it was the fastest piece of work he ever did, and equal to his best. It was written, too, at a time of great domestic anxiety. His rapidity was partly accounted for by his methods. He had an extraordinary memory, which enabled him to compose a whole article mentally, almost in its entirety, before he wrote a word. "I never," he said, "put pen to paper till I have studied my subject, and can map it all out in my mind."<sup>2</sup> "The mere act of penmanship," he wrote, "is a short process with me." "Eight or nine clear days" he thought would be enough "for penning an essay."<sup>3</sup>

No one would have guessed, even on reading his manuscripts, that they had been prepared in a hurry.

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Sept., 1855.

<sup>2</sup> The same, 1858.

<sup>3</sup> The same, March 21, 1859.

All was copied out, with scarcely a correction, in the neatest of writing on half-sheets of notepaper. His extreme short-sightedness was associated with great clearness of vision at close range, and he was also endowed with singular firmness of hand, which enabled him to write with accuracy on a minute scale. As a young man his handwriting had been a scrawl which, Mrs. Elwin declared, when she was engaged to him, was disgraceful. "Everyone who chooses," she said, "can learn to write." He took the rebuke, and set himself to remedy the defect by forming every letter as completely as in a copy-book. Having mastered the art, he preserved it, and to the end his letters and manuscripts looked almost like copper-plate printing. At one time his writing got so small that the printers returned a manuscript, begging him to have it copied in a larger hand, because they could only read it through a magnifying glass.

Ready, however, as his materials might be, and leisurely as his copy might look, the work was really accomplished by great exertion. It was to this exertion that it owed its excellence. When he once began an article, he wrote vehemently and continuously, from necessity, with his mind wrought to its highest pitch. The pressure was exhausting, but it was all gain to the work in hand. At a slower pace he worked on a less inspirited level. When he had leisure, he smoothed his phrases, and expanded his phraseology, till his language lost its sparkle. Added to this, his style, especially in the Quarterly days, was essentially rhetorical. He composed in a half-audible whisper, full of emphatic rhythm, weighing the sound of his periods, and accompanying them by a gentle movement of his head, as if he were rehearsing a speech. Thus his writing required something of the fervid emotion of an orator to give it its fullest tone. The more he was



immersed in his theme, and driven to express it with speed, the more he caught the sensitive sympathy which dictated his finest sentences. His leisured composition was less nervous and less sonorous.

Elwin's sense of oratorical effect even influenced his use of quotations. Not only did he freely change tenses and persons, in order to make extracts flow harmoniously with his own sentences, but if the structure halted, he would, by a transposition, or omission, or small correction, improve the passage till it satisfied the demands of his ear. Such alterations were very slight, and never in the remotest degree tampered with the sense of the original, but it was significant of his conceptions of literary requirements that he thought it incumbent on him to modify, in ever so little a degree, the language of those whose observations he transferred to his own pages.

The oratorical character of his style, combined with his high-sounding language, makes it easy to recognise his handiwork. "I think you must be a witch," he wrote to Lady Westmorland, in 1857, when she discovered for herself that he had written an article on Borrow. "It was so slight a production that I was certain there was nothing distinctive about it, and I did actually say to Mrs. Elwin, 'I defy Lady Westmorland to detect me here.'"<sup>1</sup> "I can't imagine," he wrote again, "by what tokens you find me out, but you seem to know my writing as easily as you would distinguish my face."<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact, nothing could be easier. So pronounced was his style that there is no difficulty in taking an article he had revised, and picking out almost every sentence that was his. The rarity of fine English, which he found so much reason to lament, made his own the more remarkable. Yet

<sup>1</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, May 7, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Feb. 6, 1857.

he was very modest about his productions. "What I do," he said, "always seems so poor to myself that I am half ashamed good judges should read them."<sup>1</sup> "I have no pleasure," he wrote, on another occasion, "in my little trivial compositions, and like to keep them out of sight and notice."<sup>2</sup> This feeling he always retained. Long after, in 1894, he said in a letter to Dr. Boyle, Dean of Salisbury, "I wrote my articles from quarter to quarter while I edited the Review, and having no time for research, they consist only of such matter as I had ready from previous reading. Knowing how slight they must have been, I have not had the courage to look into them since, and would gladly hide them up from everybody else."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, April 19, 1858.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Jan. 27, 1858.

<sup>3</sup> To Dean Boyle, May 30, 1894.

## CHAPTER VII

1854-1857

MACAULAY—LORD BROUGHAM—THACKERAY—SIR W. P. NAPIER — ELWIN'S SOCIAL ABILITIES AND CONVERSATION.

THE editorship of the Quarterly Review had a social as well as a literary side. Before Elwin had held it many years he had become acquainted with many of the most interesting characters of his time, and the intimate friend of some of them.

In the retrospect he never varied in his estimate of the ability of those whom he met at this period of his career. "In my life," he often said, in almost identical words, "I have only known three men whose genius seemed to tower above that of the rest of mankind. Those three were Brougham, Thackeray, and Macaulay. All others, however great their works might be, appeared, when one came in contact with them, to be like the rest of the world. But these three seemed to have been endowed by nature with a larger mass of brain than is given to other men."<sup>1</sup> Of the three he always gave the palm to Thackeray. Sometimes he would omit Lord Brougham from the trio, when he was speaking only of their conversational powers.

His appreciation of Macaulay increased with acquaint-

<sup>1</sup> MS. Memorandum of Conversation, Nov. 19, 1865.



ance. "His conversation," he wrote in 1854, "is by no means striking. He says nothing which fixes itself in the mind, and the general effect is that of tedious prosing."<sup>1</sup> After breakfasting with him in 1857, he said, "Macaulay was less dogmatic than usual, and really talked, instead of going on in a continuous dissertation, as he is wont."<sup>2</sup> Still later, in 1859, he met him at Dean Milman's, when Dr. Whewell, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, was one of the guests. Elwin said of the latter, "He is a man who affects to know all things, and does know a great deal. He talks much therefore, and dictatorially. But Lord Macaulay was at breakfast also, and he knows so much more than Whewell, and asserts himself so much more pertinaciously, that poor Whewell could scarce get in a word. I never knew any person who had read one half that Macaulay has done, or remembered it one tithe as well. But his talk is entirely from books. Nothing comes from his own mind—not a feeling, a sentiment, a maxim, a repartee—hardly indeed an opinion. Name a work, and he will begin to tell you its contents. Allude to a passage in a poet, and he will repeat it verbatim. It is truly astounding. But there the power ends. There is nothing felicitous in his language, or engaging in his manner, and, as he simply details what others have written, without illuminating it or investing it with the individuality of his own nature, I can easily imagine that those who meet him often must get heartily sick of him. I find him pleasant myself. Knowledge is always profitable."<sup>3</sup>

In 1865, recalling Macaulay as he had known him in the Quarterly days, he said, "Macaulay had a great massive head, and a force of expression which made it impossible to be in his company without feeling his great-

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Oct. 24, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> The same, July 16, 1857.

<sup>3</sup> The same, June 27, 1859.

ness." "I am not easily astonished," he wrote, "at the extent of other men's acquirements, knowing how much may be learnt by very moderate diligence, and how many volumes may be skimmed in the course of a single twelvemonth. But his range was truly astounding. He was not accustomed to select the topics on which he descanted. He took up the first word which other people dropped, and seemed, from the excess of his knowledge, to have made it his own peculiar study. It was the same with books. The obscurest works were as familiar to him as the most famous, and whether the reference was to Greek, Latin, German, French, Italian, or English authors, he showed perfect acquaintance with them by instantly dealing out their contents. The only production I ever heard mentioned in his presence of which he was ignorant was Cheselden's paper on the optical phenomena which presented themselves to the blind youth whose sight was restored by couching. Macaulay was greatly interested in the subject, and inquired particularly where the paper was to be found. His memory for words as well as for facts was prodigious, and he could quote large passages of prose from second-rate productions, while his stores of verse were endless.

"M. Guizot says he talked in the same style in which he wrote. Nothing can be more incorrect. Marvellous for the variety of matter, there was nothing brilliant in the manner. There were none of the short, terse, antithetical sentences which characterise his compositions. There were no vivid descriptions, no felicities of phrase, no polish in the construction of his sentences. He talked in an easy, careless, fluent strain, without ever uttering a word which struck the mind with its beauty or power. What was still more strange in a man who expresses such strong opinions in his books, his conversation was destitute of

sentiment or individuality. This was a defect, and deprived it of much of the interest which would otherwise have belonged to it. The reason was that he read an immense deal, and had not time to digest it; whereas he digested what he wrote."<sup>1</sup>

Whitwell Elwin was on very friendly terms with Lord Macaulay, but he only knew him as he met him in society. With Lord Brougham and Mr. Thackeray he had a close friendship.

"Brougham," he wrote, at the end of 1854, "is a delightful correspondent. I have somehow or other got suddenly intimate with him, and we write to each other once a week. His letters are as easy as his conversation, and have something of the vivacity of his talk. His shortest note is sure to contain a personal revelation, a scrap of information, or a sentiment or opinion which gives an interest to it. When his correspondence comes to be published, I believe it will be found as attractive as any that was ever given to the world." In October, 1855, when he paid his first visit to him, at Brougham, he wrote to Murray, "It is worth a thousand pounds to have come here. You could have no idea of his gentleness and benevolence to everything and everybody about him, unless you witnessed it. It would be marked and peculiar in anyone, and is especially striking in a strong spirit like his."<sup>2</sup> "It is very touching," he said again, "to see him after a public career, which would have seared the hearts of most people, as tender in his feelings as persons who have all their lives been cultivating their domestic affections. He has never recovered the death of his own daughter, though it is more than fifteen years since she died. In company he is very silent, often not opening his mouth during an

<sup>1</sup> Letters and MS. Memoranda.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, Oct. 11, 1855.



entire meal, but when you are alone with him he talks in an uninterrupted flow, and then nothing can be more animated and entertaining.”<sup>1</sup>

“Toadyism,” Lady Westmorland said to Elwin, when they were staying together at Bröugham, in September, 1856, “is incense for an object; veneration, the honest admiration of the heart. This last is what you and I feel for Lord Brougham.”<sup>2</sup> The regard was reciprocal, and Lord Brougham took Elwin greatly into his confidence. At this very visit they went together “into a thousand matters relative to his career,” that needed to be settled in consideration of his advancing years.<sup>3</sup>

Elwin’s appreciation of Lord Brougham was shown by his putting on paper a few memoranda of conversations with him, from which the following are extracts:—

“‘No doubt,’ Lord Brougham said, ‘my speech at the Queen’s trial produced a remarkable effect. Lord Erskine sobbed at the peroration, and the rest of the House breathed quick in a manner which resembled sobbing.’<sup>4</sup> I wrote the peroration many times over. I afterwards received several anonymous letters stating that a calumny against me was circulating in society, and entreating me, for my own credit, to contradict it, viz. that the conclusion of the speech was not extempore, but had been prepared beforehand. It would have had no merit if it had not.’

“‘We repeatedly demanded at the Queen’s trial to know who was the prosecutor. Once, adverting to this, I said the prosecution came in a questionable shape:

If shape it could be called, which shape had none  
Distinguishable in feature, joint or limb.

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Oct. 17, 1855.

<sup>2</sup> MS. Memorandum by Whitwell Elwin, Sept. 1856.

<sup>3</sup> Elwin to Murray, Sept. 22, 1856.

<sup>4</sup> Elwin once asked Lord Russell which was the greatest speech he had ever heard. Lord Russell answered unhesitatingly, “Brougham’s speech at the Queen’s trial.”—*MS. Commonplace-Book.*

George IV. interpreted this into an attack upon his legs; and was especially irritated by it. He said it was an unworthy personality.'

"I said that I had heard that some of his short preliminary speeches had been very effective. 'Well,' he said, 'we had some sharp passages of arms. On one occasion I remember Wilde declared I almost split the drum of his ear by roaring out, after setting forth the conduct of the House, in some particular, in all its aggravations, 'And now, my lords, will you dare to call yourselves a Court of *Justice*?'"

"Lord Brougham said that when he first went into the House of Lords he missed the animating cheers of the Commons. Lord Melbourne told him that his speeches would be the better for it, because he would not be tempted to enlarge upon the points which the applause showed to have taken effect upon his hearers. He found this to be true, and he considered that his speeches in the Lords, in consequence of this condensation, were superior to those which he made in the Commons.<sup>1</sup> He said his regret at leaving the Commons was such that he had never had the heart to enter the House since he ceased to be a member of it."

Thackeray was one of those whose acquaintance was made through the Review. In 1854 he wrote a little notice for the Quarterly of Leech's "Pictures of Life and Character from the Collection of Mr. Punch,"<sup>2</sup> for the sake of his "old friend and schoolfellow," "whom I remember,"

<sup>1</sup> This was Lord Brougham's settled conviction, but it was not that of his friends. Lord Campbell relates that, when dining with him on March 13th, 1847, Lord Brougham "declared that he had much improved in oratory since he came into the House of Lords. LYNDHURST: Then you don't agree in the general opinion that Henry Brougham was a greater man than Lord Brougham? BROUGHAM: Certainly not."—*Life of Lord Campbell*, vol. ii. p. 219.

<sup>2</sup> This happy title was the suggestion of John Forster.

he said, "with affection, as a pretty little boy put under my charge at Charterhouse, near thirty years ago."<sup>1</sup> The paper was published in the number for January, 1855.

"Thackeray's article," the editor wrote to Murray, "seems to me a perfect gem, full of mirth and wit, and written with exquisite truth and taste."<sup>2</sup> It much annoyed the Punch staff, owing to a paragraph in which Thackeray said, "There is no blinking the fact that in Mr. Punch's cabinet John Leech is the right-hand man. Fancy a number of Punch without Leech's pictures! What would you give for it? The learned gentlemen who write the work must feel that, without him, it were as well left alone."<sup>3</sup> What made them especially ready to suspect an intentional slight was that Thackeray had seceded from Punch, owing to a difference of opinion as to the propriety of its squibs upon Louis Napoleon. "They have risen up like one nettle," wrote Whitwell Elwin, "to sting the hand which could pen such disparaging words. It is the morbid sensitiveness engendered by authorship which is the cause of the clamour. Scribbling has much the same effect on the mind as skinning would have on the body."<sup>4</sup> "Oh, that unlucky article!" Thackeray cried in a letter. "It has given such offence! And I intended to be good-natured, and had no feeling but kindness from the first line to the last. But there's one unlucky line which says Punch, 'but for Leech's designs, might as well be let alone.' Why did I say it? I slipped it over totally in the proof. It isn't quite true. Though partly so, certainly it oughtn't to have been said by me. But

<sup>1</sup> Thackeray to Elwin, Dec. 18, 1854. Mr. John Murray writes, "Thackeray, Leech, John Murray, Dean Liddell, and G. S. Venables, were all at Charterhouse together. I believe my father was the eldest, and that Thackeray was in some way under his charge for a time."

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, Dec. 17, 1854.

<sup>3</sup> *Quarterly Review*, vol. xcvi. p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> To Miss Holley, Jan. 26, 1855.



we get to write as fast as we talk, and an idle word does awful mischief. My dear, kind old comrades, how I wish I could swallow that one!"<sup>1</sup> Happily, a reconciliation was soon effected with the injured persons.

Soon after this Thackeray and Elwin met in London. It was the beginning of one of the warmest friendships of Elwin's life. In 1855 there appeared in the *Times* a critical review of the just completed *Newcomes*, containing an attack on its "morality and religion," which wounded Thackeray's feelings. "With regard to religion," he wrote to Elwin, "I think, please God, my books are written by a God-loving man, and the morality,—the vanity of success, etc., of all but love and goodness,—is not that the teaching *Domini nostri*? You once said you did not quarrel with my ethics. Perhaps, if you write about them, you will set that dull world right about them."<sup>2</sup> Elwin undertook to review the novel in the *Quarterly*, and did so in a warmly appreciative article. "You are very good and kind to me," Thackeray wrote, on receiving the proof. "What a pleasure my dear old mother will have in reading it!"<sup>3</sup> When they met at dinner at Forster's, shortly after, on October 8th, Thackeray insisted that the editor had overpraised him. "I told him," said Elwin, "that there was probably more in his novels than he himself was aware of, for that I suspected he wrote by a sort of instinct, without marking the full import of his narrative as he went along. 'Yes,' he replied, 'I have no idea where it all comes from. I have never seen the persons I describe, nor heard the conversations I put down. I am often astonished myself to read it after I have got it on paper.'" "His unbounded frankness," Elwin continued, "surpasses what I have ever

<sup>1</sup> Thackeray to Elwin, Feb. 1, 1855.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Sept. 6, 1855.

<sup>3</sup> The same, Sept. 12, 1855.

seen in any other man. His massive head looks the very symbol of intellectual power."<sup>1</sup>

Thackeray was then about to start on his lecturing tour in America. As he was embarking from Liverpool, he wrote to Elwin, "This is only a word of thanks and farewell. If I see my way into a pleasant letter from the States, I'll send you one; and oh, how happy I'll be to come back and see you! *Salve, Vale.*"<sup>2</sup> The "pleasant letter" came in due course, narrating much of what he afterwards incorporated into his Roundabout Paper, "On a Mississippi Bubble." "It is wonderful," he said, "how the people love to hear lectures, and come through abominable slippery ice to listen to a man who is utterly weary of speaking. In most places there are two papers that applaud, and two that attack me fiercely. I don't read these latter unless surprised into them, and as for the praise, I try not to be puffed up by the same. Can anyone praise me more than a certain Norfolk parson? . . . Good-bye, my dear Elwin. This is Easter Day; mayn't I hope to meet you at Midsummer?"<sup>3</sup>

After his return, Whitwell Elwin accidentally met him in Piccadilly, on October 10th, 1856, and walked home with him, conversing. On asking if he was at work, Thackeray replied, "I began a story, was dissatisfied with it, and burnt it. I can't jump further than I did in the Newcomes, but I want to jump as far." Elwin asked what was amiss with the piece he had burnt. "It ran in the old track," said Thackeray. "I have exhausted all the types of character with which I am familiar, and it is very difficult to strike out anything new. I have thought of two or three schemes. One was to lay the scene in the time of Dr. Johnson." "Don't do that," exclaimed Elwin.

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Oct. 17, 1855.

<sup>2</sup> Thackeray to Elwin, Oct. 13, 1855.

<sup>3</sup> The same, April 8, 1856.

"Esmond is a good piece of imitation, but you cannot yourself tell that the accessories are correct, because you are obliged to take them at second-hand. A novelist can only describe his own age. You intimated in the *New-comer* that you meant to give us the history of J. J." "That," Thackeray replied, "was what I had begun, but it was commenced in too melancholy a strain. I want to have a cheerful hero, though this is very difficult, for a cheerful character must have some deeper element to give sufficient dignity and interest. It is hardly possible to have a hero without a dash of melancholy. I think the cheerful man must be the second character—a good-humoured, pleasant rogue. But people are always complaining that my clever people are rascals, and the good people idiots." Elwin urged him to "describe a domestic family, enjoying the genuine blessings of calm, domestic felicity, put in contrast with the vexations and hollowness of fashionable life." Thackeray replied pathetically, "How can I describe that sort of domestic calm? I have never seen it. I have lived all my life in Bohemia. Besides, there would be very little to describe. It must of necessity want movement. I intended to show J. J. married, and exhibit him with the trials of a wife and children. I meant to make him in love with another man's wife, and recover him through his attachment for the little ones." "This story," said Elwin, "I begged him not to write."<sup>1</sup>

There was perhaps no one at all in whose company Whitwell Elwin ever delighted so much as in Thackeray's. "All my recollections of him are pleasant," he said in 1865; "I can never speak of him without a pang, for I loved him. He was a fine, noble man." "His manners," he said, "were simple as a child's. He had no assumption,

<sup>1</sup> MS. Memorandum.



no affectation. His conversation was in the last degree easy.”<sup>1</sup> Thackeray’s liking for Elwin was warm. Both men were admirable conversationalists, in different veins, but with common interests and a common appreciation of humour and literature. There was, moreover, an artless simplicity of a certain kind, combined with Elwin’s genius, which took Thackeray’s fancy. He called him Dr. Primrose, and generally addressed him so in his letters, after they became intimate. Part of the ground of his affection was indicated in a note written to Elwin at a later date. “All people don’t like me as you do,” Thackeray said; “I think sometimes I am deservedly unpopular, and in some cases I rather like it. Why should I want to be liked by Jack and Tom? . . . I know the Thackeray that those fellows have imagined to themselves—a very selfish, heartless, artful, morose, and designing man.—What gall and wormwood is trickling from my pen! Well, there’s no black drop in *you*, Mr. Parson; but, mind you, primroses are very rare flowers by the side of Thames. . . . This scrap was written a week ago: don’t you think it were best burned? Many letters were best burned; for example, love letters, and especially *hate* letters. But if I don’t send this one off to you, how on earth shall I communicate with my Vicar of Wakefield? You know I am too lazy to begin a new page. . . . A gossiping letter! Well, upon my word, this is a rarity! Good-bye, my dear Vicar. Mind and come and see us when you come up.”<sup>2</sup>

Another friend for whom Elwin had an ardent regard, was made through the *Quarterly Review*, during the early years of his editorial work. This was Sir William Napier, the historian of the Peninsular war, then engaged in

<sup>1</sup> MS. Notes of Conversation.

<sup>2</sup> Thackeray to Elwin, May 24, 1861.

writing the Life of his brother, Sir Charles. Murray, in 1856, sent the proof-sheets of the book for Elwin to read and criticise. He was fascinated by their contents. "There are not," he wrote, "above two or three first-rate biographies in the world. This will add one more to the number. It is quite unique, for no other character which has been drawn at full length in the least resembles that of Sir Charles. It is a surprise to come upon such winning depth of feeling, in conjunction with all the chivalrous qualities which befit the soldier. The combination is bewitching. He is one of the few men whose reputation will be immensely increased by his biography, and my own expectation is that he will be thought the most engaging of all the heroes whose lives have ever been given to the world. There is nothing in the Duke's papers which will go to the heart like a hundred passages in the Letters and Journals of Sir Charles Napier."<sup>1</sup> He considered, however, that the book had great defects, and that it was "a thousand pities to spoil so admirable a subject," as Sir William was doing, by "overdone abuse and needless repetitions." "If the bulk is double what it ought to be, he will do much more than halve its interest and the number of his readers."<sup>2</sup> Sir William's language was so strong that Mrs. Elwin nicknamed him "General Cayenne," and Sir William himself alluded, in one of his letters, to "the immense quantity of brimstone and treacle" which the public found in his own character and in that of his brother.<sup>3</sup> Murray asked Elwin to use his influence to persuade the general to modify his violent terms. "The Napiers," he replied, "are not a manageable race, and I fear there is little chance of Sir William heeding anything

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, July 20, 1856.

<sup>2</sup> The same, July 18 and 28, 1856.

<sup>3</sup> Sir W. P. Napier to Elwin, Feb. 11, 1857.

I can say.”<sup>1</sup> When the publisher tried to bring Napier into communication with Elwin on the point, Sir William wrote curtly, “Mr. Murray has asked me to communicate with you about some alterations he desires; but I will not. You know that an author cannot write on other people’s notions. He must, if he is to make an impression on his readers, write earnestly and from his own views. I have considered my work deeply, and must abide the consequences as an author.”<sup>2</sup> “I have written to General Cayenne,” Elwin said to Murray, “but have no hope of doing much good. He may put out a little abuse, and a few stray paragraphs, but he will keep to his four volumes, and his bitterness, to the infinite injury of what might have been one of the best biographies in the world.”<sup>3</sup> He did, however, consent to make some alterations and erasures, though he still left much which his friends would have wished to see excised.

The correspondence between the editor and the general resulted in a meeting, and they at once became friends. “I have seldom,” Sir William Napier wrote to Murray, “at first sight taken a greater liking to a man. He appeared to me a man of fine feeling and great sincerity.”<sup>4</sup> Elwin admired him profoundly. “The dear old general,” he said, “has such a gentle heart, with all his controversial fire, that I have a strong regard for him.”<sup>5</sup> Elwin had undertaken to review the *Life of Sir Charles Napier*. “The book,” he said, “will interest me more than any subject upon which I ever wrote, and I will spare no pains to do justice to both author and hero.”<sup>6</sup> “I never had my heart so much in anything,” he wrote, while he was working at it, under great pressure of time. “He was

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, July 28, 1856.

<sup>2</sup> Sir W. P. Napier to Elwin, Nov. 1, 1856.

<sup>3</sup> To Murray, Nov. 10, 1856.

<sup>4</sup> Sir W. P. Napier to Murray, 1856.

<sup>5</sup> To Murray, Jan. 29, 1857.

<sup>6</sup> The same, Aug. 15, 1856.



neither a good politician nor a good theologian. These were subjects which he had never properly studied, but he was a wonderful soldier, and had a heart as gentle as it was brave. I think his story one of the most moving and striking in the world, and the more I ponder it the more it touches me."<sup>1</sup> He found it impossible to deal with it adequately in a single article, and broke off on the eve of Sir Charles Napier's Indian career, which he postponed for a second paper.

Sir William was as much won by Elwin's essay as the latter had been by the original memoir. "Every line you write," he said, as they were corresponding about it, "makes a connecting fibre of my brain and heart vibrate in union with your words."<sup>2</sup> "I have just finished reading your article," he wrote, on its publication, "and to say I am pleased would be a very inadequate expression of my feelings. Into those I will not enter, but will express my admiration of the grasping power of your mind in epitomising so large a subject, and at the same time say that the only disagreeable sense I have is the very superior manner in which you have told the early anecdotes, a manner I feel to be so very much better than my own that my vanity collapses in reading them."<sup>3</sup> Sir William Napier once told Elwin that the conformation of his head was that of a general. "I hope I do not bore you," he wrote, "by my observations on military matters, but you have such good notions of them that you tempt me to intrude."<sup>4</sup>

If a few such men as Macaulay, Brougham, Thackeray, and Napier towered above the rest, in Elwin's mind, they by no means exhausted the list of those whose genius he

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Jan. 8, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> Sir W. P. Napier to Elwin, Jan. 14, 1857.

<sup>3</sup> The same, Jan. 27, 1857.

<sup>4</sup> The same, April 8, 1857.

recognised, or whose fine qualities he esteemed. He had a quick perception for character, and a generous appreciation for ability wherever it existed. But he never wrote any systematic reminiscences, and rarely even jotted down his stray recollections, except occasionally in correspondence, of which the largest part has disappeared. It would be objectless to draw up a catalogue of his intimates, merely for the celebrity of their names, where there are no observations of his own to append. His friends, however, included a very wide circle of notable individuals. Some he saw at "The Club," founded by Dr. Johnson, which met at the Thatched House Tavern, where he always enjoyed the company. Others gathered round the hospitable table of Mr. John Murray, at Albemarle Street, where Elwin immediately became a close and affectionate friend of the family. He frequently dined with Panizzi, the Director of the British Museum, whom he regarded as one of the pleasantest of hosts, as well as the centre of brilliant gatherings of men. Breakfasts at Gladstone's and Monckton Milnes' (afterwards Lord Houghton), visits to his kind friend John Forster, and social parties at Lord Westmorland's and many other houses, introduced him to very varied groups of society, all more or less distinguished by position or intellect. At all these assemblies he was a welcome guest, for he had great social gifts, and was himself as admirable in talk as in writing.

Elwin was indeed a remarkable conversationalist. His vast range of information, his power of apt illustration, his keen interests, acute judgments, and well-formed opinions, all expressed with a complete mastery over a choice and vigorous language, gave his talk much sparkle and brilliancy. He never spoke for effect, and being somewhat shy, he did not, as a rule, care to address many persons at once, though when he was once embarked

on a subject he became so absorbed in it that he often forgot his surroundings, and would speak at ease to a number. But a general conversation distracted his mind, and even in company he was best at a duologue.

"To anyone accustomed to the superficial and trivial character of much that passes for conversation," says the present Mr. John Murray, "there was a fascination—no other word will describe the sensation—in Mr. Elwin's talk. Whatever the subject discussed, and whoever might be his companion, his thoughts never seemed to wander; he was wholly concentrated in the subject and the person before him. And he had the power of raising any subject from a mere discussion of commonplace details to the higher plane of general principles. He seemed by intuition to divine another person's point of view, and from his own well-stored and logical mind to lay before his hearer the ideas which he or she wished to evolve, but clothed with a far fuller knowledge than most people could lay claim to. He would sit, swaying his body gently backwards and forwards, touching the tips of his fingers, with his hands raised in front of him; and, with his eyes half closed, would pour forth a stream of information, of criticism, of reminiscence, or of counsel, as the case might require, in a manner which at once arrested attention and fixed itself upon the memory. There was a peculiarity about his voice and an earnestness in his manner which at times reminded me of Mr. Gladstone at his best. But the peculiarity was not the same in the two men: in Mr. Gladstone it was the distinct Lancashire 'burr'; in Mr. Elwin it was an open pronunciation of the vowels which can be best described by an illustration. He had been telling a ghost story to a small circle of hearers, and had worked them up to the proper pitch of expectation, when the climax came. 'What do you think it was?



Why, an *oal*,' meaning, of course, an 'owl.' " The peculiarity noticed by Mr. Murray had a similar local origin to that in Gladstone's phraseology. It was a relic of the Norfolk dialect.

The excellence of Elwin's talk was enhanced by its sympathy. He entered into the feeling of the subjects on which he spoke, not as an outsider, but as one of whom they formed a part. Similarly he would throw himself into the circumstances and minds of people with whom he conversed as though they were his own. He was naturally interested in persons and their concerns, and was a patient listener as they detailed them. Indeed, he often was more interested in them than they were themselves, until their own sensibilities were aroused by his. His attraction to the inner personalities of those whom he met quickly broke down all artificial barriers of intercourse. Usually he became intimate with a person at a first meeting, and not seldom in the first five minutes. Staying in a house, where the host was an elderly invalid who could not leave his room, and where the lady had to spend much time with him, Elwin found himself alone after dinner with a granddaughter. "Perceiving," he said, in a letter, "that she and I would have to pass a good deal of time together, and that it would be very dull for both of us if we had to preserve the constraint and formal conversation of an acquaintance only two or three hours' old, I thought it best to leap over formalities, and told her to draw her chair to the fire and have a good gossip with me. I represented to her that, in order for us to start at the point which under ordinary circumstances we should not reach till we had been six months in the same house, she must describe to me her parents, her brothers and sisters, her friends and acquaintances, her personal likes and dislikes, her feelings, tastes, and pursuits, and that

she might conclude with telling me all about the young gentleman she was in love with. I added that the reason why I stipulated that this should come last was that, if I allowed her to begin with it, we should talk of nothing else. She declared that she was not in love with any young gentleman, but she took graciously to the other topics and made a clean breast of it."

Elwin inspired such confidence by his irresistible geniality that people usually poured out all their thoughts, difficulties, and aspirations to him unreservedly. Whatever they were, he was absorbed in them for the time. Whether it was a man's literary work, a woman's domestic troubles, the quarrels of a household, the love affairs of a young couple, the pecuniary embarrassments of a spendthrift, the perplexities of a religious doubter, or any other of the thousand and one subjects which exercise the lives of mortals, he was alike ungrudging in the time and trouble he would give to their assistance. He was always excellent at giving advice, and was a clear and decided counsellor. Thus he naturally became, not merely a social guest for an evening, but the trusted friend of those who had once conversed with him. "I do not even know your name," said one who had met him casually at a party, "and yet I have told you all my history."

All Elwin's emotions were strong, his affections tender. His friendships were therefore intensely warm. His cordiality to those whom he liked took their hearts by storm. John Forster once wrote of a visit he paid to Booton, that he was received with "a greeting from Elwin such as he only can give." "His handshake," wrote one who knew him well, "was the most fervently cordial thing imaginable. It was no conventional greeting, but conveyed a direct and swift message from his heart to yours, and the luminous eyes seemed to look right through

you, but in so kindly a way that one did not mind what was revealed to them." His welcomes were fervid even to those with whom he had no extraordinary friendship, for he warmed to most of those whom he met. They expressed a heartiness which might be beyond his ordinary feeling towards the person, but they were no exaggeration of the genuine sentiment of the moment. Had his sympathetic ardour always remained at the same high pitch towards each, life would have been intolerable. As it was, his friendships often taxed him severely, by the demands they made upon his feelings and time.

"A more sympathetic companion," Lord Lytton wrote at a later date,—but the remark was equally applicable earlier,—“does not exist among men. He has a wonderful flow of charm and conversation, which wells and bubbles up, with great spontaneity, from a richly stored mind,—a mind in which a wide field of literary culture has blossomed into those flowers of thought and expression which enliven and beautify human intercourse. But to me one of his chief charms is a quick sense of humour, which I think a very rare gift even amongst intellectual people. The majority of mankind seems to be utterly destitute of it.”<sup>1</sup>

This sense of humour was strongly characteristic of him. In his early days it took the form of boyish fun. It necessarily rather changed its tone with years, but he always relished a lightly touched jest, and always had an eye for the quaint side of characters and incidents. When he was in spirits, he was generally ready to interpose some quiet stroke of dry wit. He went, in 1855, to the marriage of one of his sisters. As they were preparing to go to church, Mary Symonds, another sister, espied him putting on a new pair of black kid gloves. “My dear

<sup>1</sup> The Earl of Lytton to Mrs. Elwin, Nov. 27, 1883.



Whitty," she exclaimed, "you are never going to wear *black* gloves! they will look so melancholy." "Well," he said, still drawing on the fingers, "and is not this a melancholy occasion?" The Elwins went to stay with the Symonds family in the autumn of the same year. The companionship of his relations took him back to his youthful feelings. He regaled the Grammar School boys with a sack of apples, and played football with them himself with such vigour that he got overheated and caught a chill, which so crippled his hand with rheumatism that for some days he could not hold a pen.

Sometimes his humorous sallies were misunderstood. "I went," he wrote in 1859, "to dine with the E.'s, and in the evening Mrs. E. whispered in my ear, 'Do you remember the advice you gave me before I was married?' 'No,' said I, 'but I hope it was valuable advice.' 'Very indeed,' said she gravely; 'you told me that my husband was an untrained colt who would be sure to go wrong unless I put a bridle upon him and led him, and then you assured me that if I would follow the rules you gave me, I should soon break him in. I *have* followed them, and it has succeeded completely. He very rarely does anything that I do not wish him to do.' I did not dare to ask what the rules were. I had a presentiment that it was such wild rhodomontade as you know I sometimes talk, and which I had no conception she could interpret literally. However, she is likely to be far the most judicious master of the two, and so perhaps no harm has been done."

Elwin's Quarterly Review days fell in the period when stories were still in greater request at parties than became the fashion somewhat later. Good talkers had their stock of them, and he took his share in the fashion. His power of sympathy, his unreserved geniality, and his excellent voice

and language made him admirable at an anecdote. His large acquaintance with persons and literature afforded an unfailing scope for apt illustrations, and interesting reminiscences. "I have listened with delight," writes one of his sons, "to the hundreds of stories which my father has told in the many hours spent in the evening by the Booton fireside. Some of them he retold many times, and one was glad to hear them again. Certainly there never was a more delightful man to talk to, when he was in his best vein. And it was a wonderful instance of his powers of conversation that an evening, which began with tea at six and often extended till midnight, was entirely devoted to conversation, without any thought of any other occupation."

The stories were, however, but the lighter pleasantries of a mind richly stored with wisdom. Elwin's friends, much as they might enjoy the sparkle of his gayer moods, would always speak of his serious conversation on great subjects as that in which he excelled. He would talk for hours upon literature, bringing out the stores of a vast acquaintance with books and men. Best of all he liked to discourse upon religion, when he was in suitable company. For argument he had little taste on any subject, and he especially disliked it upon sacred ones. It was when he could exchange ideas with a sympathetic spirit, or when he could instruct a willing learner, that he really enjoyed spiritual conversation. There was no topic on which he became so earnest and emphatic. Many owed to his talks with them a grasp of the principles of duty, and a trust in matters of faith, which made the turning-point of their lives. His brilliant powers as a conversationalist were not merely employed to amuse; they were used for the benefit of those who came across his own path of life.

## CHAPTER VIII

1857-1858

DOMESTIC ADVERSITIES — THE QUARTERLY REVIEW —  
THACKERAY IN NORWICH — PROPOSALS FOR PRO-  
MOTION — CUDDESDON COLLEGE CONTROVERSY —  
ARTICLES FOR THE REVIEW.

THE year 1857 opened sadly for the family at Booton. On January 23rd, Mrs. Elwin gave birth to the long-wished-for daughter, who lived barely time enough to breathe. "What mothers feel on these occasions," wrote her husband, "I suppose none but mothers know, and she, who has devoted her whole life to her children, is almost wild with grief."<sup>1</sup> It threw her into such an illness that he did not dare to leave her for his usual visit to London at the time of the publication of the Review. "It requires all the nerve I can summon up," he wrote to Lady Westmorland, "to keep composed in such distress, and could not succeed at all if I did not give way when I was alone."<sup>2</sup> Immediately after this, scarlet fever broke out, and spread to the whole household. To complete their misery, nobody could be found to nurse the sick inmates, and the duty devolved upon Elwin who was himself very unwell. Mrs. Elwin's attack was the worst, and it was only her strong constitution that saved her life. When the

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Jan., 1857.

<sup>2</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, Jan. 24, 1857.



"dreadful suspense" was over, and the patients were pronounced out of danger, Elwin said, "It seems by contrast perfect Elysium."<sup>1</sup> In recalling what he had gone through, four years after, he wrote, "I have known what it is to sit by a sick-bed with a heart torn with apprehension, and those who have endured the misery have such a keen remembrance of it that they have ever after a quick sense of what others endure in the same situation."<sup>2</sup>

Sympathetic letters flowed in from friends as their distress became known. When Mrs. Elwin was at her worst, her husband took some of them up to her room, thinking she would like to hear them read. "No," she said, "I have not the least interest in them";—but then, after a pause, she added, "I should like to hear Mr. Murray's. That is the only one I care about. His kindness is so great and so genuine that that will soothe me."<sup>3</sup> One that touched Elwin much came from Sir William Napier, written when he had heard the news of the death of the infant. "Your grief," he said, "pains me. Too well I know what it is. Children are to me the first and best objects of creation. Alas! your letter has called up deep sorrow. My beautiful lost daughter Louisa was of such angelic spirit that she could not conceive wrong, and could not avoid conceiving right. It is for her the black lines are around my paper, and the blackness of despair, I could almost say, about my head. However, she is at rest. Pardon me for troubling you, but misery will speak."<sup>4</sup>

Those who are familiar with Sir Charles Napier's Journals will remember how he was accustomed to

<sup>1</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, Feb. 6, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> The same, April 12, 1861.

<sup>3</sup> Elwin to Murray, Feb. 5, 1857.

<sup>4</sup> Sir W. P. Napier to Elwin, Jan. 26, 1857.

attribute events to a sort of blind "fate." His brother was in this, as in much else, his counterpart. Writing to Elwin, July 24th, 1857, of their similar anxieties, he said, "My dear Mr. Elwin, I believe the best remedy against the depressing effect of such things is to believe the worst, and accept it as destiny, and then all favourable turns come as supports. But I will not pursue this train of thought to *you*. I rejoice to hear that you are regaining tranquillity."<sup>1</sup>

While Elwin was in the midst of his troubles he had turned to literary work for solace. "Occupation," he said, "is absolutely necessary to me just now. My feelings would wear me more than any amount of exertion." He proposed to start upon Boswell and Johnson as a subject for the Quarterly Review. "It is," he said, "a most favourite topic of mine, and I am eager to pay a tribute to poor old Croker while he is alive to read it."<sup>2</sup> Still unwell and harassed, he wrote to Murray a few days later, "I hope on Monday to be at work with a sound body and a quiet mind."<sup>3</sup> But he found himself then, and for long after, too unnerved to embark on so considerable a project, and he did not carry it out till the following year, before which Croker had died. The calamities with which 1857 had opened left their mark on his writing, for though he furnished a paper for each number of the Review, he contributed nothing of first-rate importance for the next twelve months.

He began by reviewing Borrow's books. *Romany Rye* was then in course of being printed, and the editor was sent the proof-sheets for the purpose. He took a

<sup>1</sup> Sir W. P. Napier to Elwin, July 24, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, Jan. 27, 1857. Croker's edition of Boswell's *Johnson* was then the standard one, and would therefore be the peg on which to hang an article.

<sup>3</sup> To Murray, Feb. 5, 1857.

special interest in the work, for he had tried to influence its composition. After Borrow had visited Booton, in 1853, Elwin had written him a letter "to beg him to give his sequel to *Lavengro* more of a historical, and less of a romancing air." "It is not," he wrote to Murray, "the statements themselves which provoke incredulity, but the melodramatic effect which he tries to impart to all his adventures."<sup>1</sup> "Instead of roaring like a lion," in reply, as Elwin had expected, he returned quite a "lamb-like note,"<sup>2</sup> which gave promise of a greater success for his new work than its precursor. When the review was almost finished, it was on the point of being altogether withdrawn, owing to a passage in *Romany Rye*, which Elwin said was clearly meant to be a reflection on his friend Ford, "to avenge the presumed refusal of the latter to praise *Lavengro* in the *Quarterly Review*." "I am very anxious," he said, "to get Borrow justice for rare merits which have been entirely overlooked, but if he persists in publishing an attack of this kind I shall, I fear, not be able to serve him."<sup>3</sup> The objectionable paragraphs had been written by Borrow under a misapprehension, and he cancelled them as soon as he was convinced of his error. The difficulty being thus got over, the notice was published in March, 1857, under the title, "*Roving Life in England*." Though it had not been a very exacting one to prepare, it was perhaps the best review of a book, simply regarded as a review, that Elwin wrote for the *Quarterly*. It was written in a bright and easy style, which did not suggest any impression of mental suffering.

He was, nevertheless, in a very depressed condition. Describing his sensations and their origin in a letter to Lord Brougham, he said, "I have been in a pitiable state,

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Oct. 21, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Oct. 26, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> The same, March, 1857.



of which I have not liked to speak to anybody, and which, without rational cause, has incapacitated me for all exertion. It was brought on by a fever which threatened the lives of my wife and children. I have been oppressed by a morbid dejection, and by an equally morbid shrinking from doing things which, yet, not to do was a perpetual distress. It is a condition which no one probably can understand who has not experienced it, for it depends upon an inward feeling which seems to have no adequate cause. I am well enough in body, and physical weakness has no share in this impotence of will. I have before experienced lesser degrees of the same malady, but never was fairly overcome by it till now.”<sup>1</sup> He wrote in the same strain to Lady Westmorland, in May, showing that the effects of his trouble had not yet worn off. “The anxiety in which I lived,” he says, “brought on a nervous state of mind, and I have not been myself during the whole of last quarter. I have had a sort of morbid shrinking from my usual occupations, and a kind of mental prostration which was to the last degree painful to me. It is only by great exertion that I have managed to shake it off, and get back to my old habits and normal elasticity.”

His lowness of spirits made the difficulties inherent to carrying on a Review like the Quarterly extremely burdensome to him. Two or three times in the course of 1857 he seemed seriously to be meditating retirement from the editorship. When Murray—who was made uneasy by the criticisms of the old politicians of the Croker school upon the newer Conservatism that was creeping into the Quarterly—impressed upon its conductor that “it must stick to its principles,” Elwin wrote, “I suspect a difference of opinion between us which will make it necessary for me to retire from the editorship of the Q. R.”

<sup>1</sup> To Lord Brougham, March 26, 1857.

He proposed that the Review should be kept "afloat without compromising it," while the publisher was finding "a fit steersman." "I begin," he said, "to feel powerfully that, except as a *locum tenens*, I am not the right man in the right place."<sup>1</sup>

Explaining more fully the political principles on which he acted, he said, "My notion is briefly this—that the Review must represent the Conservative party of *our* generation, and not of the *past* generation. No individual is entirely consistent, for it would be to presume either that he was born perfectly wise, or that he was incapable of profiting by experience. Still less are *parties* entirely consistent. An attentive observation of them shows that they are obliged to modify their views, even within comparatively short periods, to suit varying events. Now a Review which exists from generation to generation must move with its party, or it will, like the party, vary in some respects from its former self. The Q. R. has done so already. It was very different in its early days from what it subsequently became in Croker's days, for, when it was started, Canning and George Ellis largely influenced its management, and the principles put forth in it were to a great extent those of Pitt. That it must again introduce some modifications into its policy, or rather, maintain those which have been introduced already, if it is to represent the Conservatives of our time, is the point which I feel strongly."<sup>2</sup>

The publisher, of course, would endorse such a policy. He had only intended to inculcate caution, and he earnestly deprecated Elwin's threat of resignation. Nor did the editor press it further, though from this time he began to revert to it periodically, when he was more than usually unwell, or more than usually fretted by his editorial duties.

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, April 8, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> The same, 1857.

So entirely does the excellence of a journal like the Quarterly Review depend upon its editor, that immediately the effort to find good writers and subjects is relaxed, the supply, always difficult to keep up at a high standard, is sure to fall off. In 1857 Elwin was unequal to the task of negotiating for articles with the energy that had characterised his first efforts, and when he came to the preparation of the summer number he found his materials for it very inadequate. He himself contributed an article on China, of which he gave a summary account in a letter to a friend. "It gives," he said, "in a condensed form, the information scattered through many books, respecting the character and customs of the people. This is its only value, if it has any value at all, which it probably has not."<sup>1</sup> It was merely a made-up paper, and so much below his own best writing that, if he had not acknowledged it to be his, it might be taken rather for the work of some less experienced hand, remodelled by himself. He had intended besides to write upon Livingstone's African Travels, then just published. "I will," he said, "have a review of Dr. Livingstone's book, if I sit up all night to write it. He is such a noble character, and his whole scheme so praiseworthy, that I would on no account let slip the opportunity."<sup>2</sup> This, however, he did not accomplish, and the essays of others proved disappointing. The result was that he thought he had turned out "a very bad number." "In despair," he said, "of finding people who can write, I mean to furnish half the next number myself."<sup>3</sup> But at the same time that he was thus meditating increased labour on the Review, he was wishing to be free from it that he might employ himself, as he considered, to better purpose. He obtained from Murray

<sup>1</sup> July 16, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, June 2, 1857.

<sup>3</sup> Letters, July, 1857.



an interleaved copy of Johnson's Dictionary, that he might be collecting materials for a new edition. In this he wrote down a few supplementary illustrations from standard authors. He had also agreed to assist in the editing of Pope's Works. He had designs, too, of "working harder, and secluding himself more," that he might produce some substantial book of his own. "I must," he wrote, "first get rid of the Review, which I will do the moment somebody can be found to succeed me. In the meanwhile I will do the best I can with it, and shall every quarter make a portion of what I contribute turn upon the topics of the work I have devised, so as to be hereafter available for it."<sup>1</sup> The allusion was no doubt to his projected Lives of the Poets.

His autumn article had, however, nothing to do with this. He probably found himself again unequal to his highest form of authorship. His paper was founded on a manual by Professor Blunt, bearing the title of "The Parish Priest." His first idea had been "to draw the complete portrait of a model clergyman." He satisfied himself in the end with dwelling "upon certain points in which we of the present day seem to be deficient." "I hope," he said, "to write myself into doing some of the things I recommend."<sup>2</sup> It was, in fact, somewhat of a theoretic sketch, though containing many excellent and useful suggestions. While he considered that, as editor of the Review, he was bound to make it "the organ of the Church of England at large," and not of his "particular shade of churchmanship," he did not feel precluded from expressing his "own opinions" in an individual paper,<sup>3</sup> and he took this opportunity of indicating his position on some points of ecclesiasticism.

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, July 16, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> The same, July 24, 1857.

<sup>3</sup> To Murray, Feb. 28, 1858.

"Visitors," he said in a letter during the summer of 1857, had been "as plentiful as flies." He was at no time very fond of the interference with his customary habits caused by a prolonged succession of them. In his depressed frame of mind, they would have been more than usually fretting. He was still feeling unwell, and unfit for society.

Both he and Mrs. Elwin, however, had greatly enjoyed a couple of days in Norwich, in May, when Thackeray came there to deliver his lectures on the Four Georges. They stayed at an hotel, taking their children with them. Thackeray, who was staying at another hotel, was to some extent their guest, and Elwin acted as his guide to Norwich. The proprietor of a local newspaper had written to invite the lecturer to his private house, and remonstrated with him, in Elwin's hearing, at having received no reply. "No doubt," said Thackeray quietly, "your letter is among that packet of unopened letters I left in town." Picking up a note which the same gentleman had written to him since his arrival, he said, somewhat rudely, but in a vein of comic good-humour, "I am going to light my cigar with your very valuable autograph."

Thackeray was in a delightful mood, quite at his ease, and full of conversation. Mrs. Elwin put down at the time a hastily written record of the visit, and some of its items are worth quoting as they stand:—

"He speaks very low. I found it needed attention to catch each word. He does not develop his ideas much; he only puts into words just the thought that passes through his own mind. This gives a fragmentary air to his talk. He seems little to care whether it is set off fully and to advantage, or even whether those who hear him altogether take it in. He showed two manners,—

one very quiet, very earnest, very deep, almost pathetic; another (a general and much more common manner) is like one who played at ball with every subject, tossing them about with a light, careless, but unerring hand, taking up one thing after another,—serious and gay, trifling or important,—and sporting with them as though he would get pleasantry out of everything. But if any religious subject was spoken of he talked with solemnity and earnestness.

“If you did not know who he was, the first thing which would strike you would be that he was a man who looked with a magician’s eye through and through everything before him. In five minutes you know he has made a complete inventory of the room, and he has weighed out everybody in it. He sits quietly watching a face for two whole minutes, and then he turns away, having spelt every letter of the character. He is constantly speaking of the sort of face a man has,—‘he has a bad face,’ ‘a hang-dog face,’ etc. Badness mars all talent in his eyes. He talks of someone who is clever, and he then adds, ‘But he is a bad man,’ as if we had no right to admire a bad clever man. On the other hand, he is always throwing in gentle, considerate excuses for everybody. ‘So-and-so has this and that weakness.’—‘Ah, but then remember such and such a reason for his excuse,’—‘Remember such and such a good quality notwithstanding.’ He seems to notice the slightest specks of goodness.

“As the hour for the lecture got near, he left. I had gone soon after dinner to sit with the children. When Thackeray left the dining-room he opened the door where we were, and said in his grave, pathetic voice, ‘I am come to say good-night,’ and took each child’s hand, and lingered for a moment with their hands in his own. Then he stepped out into the balcony, took out his purse, and



threw a shilling to a brass band which had been playing before the window. 'Now then for the sermon,' he said, turning to me, and went to his own hotel to prepare for the lecture.

"He talks quite freely and simply of his own writings—tells a story, and then adds that it suggested such and such a trait of one of his characters. He said, 'People tell me such and such a character is not natural; but I *know* it is natural, that it is to the life.'

"It is evident that he does not set a tremendous price on his own writings. It appears as if he did not, and could not, labour them; and, being the produce of little effort, he cannot believe they are what they are. He replied to some of Whitwell's admiration of him, 'Yes, but you rave; you are a maniac.' Whitwell asked him how he found out his true vein, as his earliest things were not in it. He said he began to write when his misfortunes began, and then found it.

"He said he regretted not having illustrated the *New-comer* himself. Whitwell said the conception of the Colonel's face and figure was fine. 'Oh yes,' he said, 'but I gave it Doyle. I drew the Colonel for him.'

"He laughed at the idea of future fame. He said he could not understand why any should care for fame after they were dead.

"His mother he described as having been exquisitely handsome, and as fascinating everyone who came in her way. 'When I was a child my mother took me to Exeter, to a concert. She looked like a duchess. She came splendidly dressed, in a handsome carriage, and all suitable appurtenances. That was thirty years ago.<sup>1</sup> The next

<sup>1</sup> In 1827 Thackeray was sixteen. His stepfather and his mother had moved into Devonshire in 1825. He must have been a boy therefore, rather than a "child."

time I went to Exeter it was I who danced on the tight rope.<sup>1</sup> I took the girls down with me. I could see that the waiter at the inn took them for part of the performance, and expected them to put on their trousers and spangles, and come in and sing a comic song. We went and saw the place where Pendennis kissed Miss Costigan, and identified it all quite satisfactorily.'

"The first literary man I ever met was Croly. I was a lad of seventeen, on the top of a coach, going to Cambridge. Somebody pointed Croly out to me. I had read Salathiel at sixteen,<sup>2</sup> and thought it divine. I turned back and gazed at him. The person who pointed him out to me said, "I see that lad is fated!" He knew it by the way I gazed after him as a literary man.'

"I once lent a man £300 to get an outfit for India. He lived on the same stairs with me at the Temple. He was to pay me when he could, and in course of time he did pay me. He came home to England, and I went to see him, and asked him to dine with me that day three weeks,—at all events, my first vacant day. I asked him three times, and he never would come. At last he said, "The truth is, I *can't* come. If it had been in India, and you had come there, my house would have been open to you, and not to you only, but to all your friends to come and make it a home. And I come to England, and you ask me to dine with you *this day three weeks!*" The truth is, they live in India, and cherish such ideas of England, and a home, and love, that when they come to it they are disappointed.—You remember, Colonel Newcome was invited to dine *that day three weeks* with his brother?'

<sup>1</sup> Thackeray had given his lectures on the Georges at Exeter shortly before this.

<sup>2</sup> Salathiel was not published till 1829, the year Thackeray went up to Cambridge, when he was nearly eighteen.

“‘I think I shall take the girls, and go to India next year. I should like to see my native country. I have friends in almost all the judgeships. Twelve lectures would pay for it.’ Whitwell expressed his astonishment at his wish, but said, ‘I take it, you like a roving life.’ ‘Yes,’ said he, ‘I like it. I should never be at home if I could help.’—‘But, can you write away from home?’—‘I write better anywhere than at home, and I write less at home than anywhere. I did not write ten pages of the *Newcomes* in that house at Brompton.<sup>1</sup> I wrote two lectures in it. The last half of the *Newcomes* I wrote at Paris. This’—meaning an hotel—‘is the best place to write in. After a good breakfast, I make one of the girls sit down to write. It is slow work. Sometimes not a sentence for a quarter of an hour. I could not do that with a stranger. With the young ones it is different, and they are delighted. A Scotchman came to me a little while ago, and I tried him as secretary, but he was deaf. I would begin, At this moment Anna entered the room, when the Captain observed to the Countess—What?—*The Captain observed to the Countess.*—But, you know, that couldn’t go on.’

“Talking of the wearisomeness of going about lecturing, he said, ‘There is something very sweet about it, too. I meet everywhere such kindness and hospitality,—taken into families, and making friends among them,—so that there is quite a little heart-pang at parting.’ ‘People bring me autograph books to write my name in,—books full of the autographs of singers, fiddlers—I can’t conceive what they can want the autograph of a fiddler for. So I wrote my name under Signor Twankeydillo.—Now your address.—But that was too much, I would not write my address.’

<sup>1</sup> His home was then 36, Onslow Square.



"He said he made £70 by the lecture for ——. 'I always have a charity lecture every year. It is so pleasant to feel that I always have twenty pounds in my pocket for a poor man.'

"'A lady, a blue, at New York, said to me at dinner, I was told I should not like you, and I don't.—And, I replied, I don't in the least care whether you like me or no.—She looked so surprised.'

"Whitwell said it was delightful to walk with him from Norwich to Thorpe, and see his keen enjoyment of the scene and of the beautiful day. He noticed the quick, artistic eye with which he viewed everything, but Thackeray said that it distressed him to find that he did not observe as much as he formerly did.

"He told me it had been a delightful day to him, going over the old city. He said it was 'a charming old city.' He had thought Exeter a very fine city, but Norwich was much better. He thought the beauty of the cathedral cloisters wonderful. He went over the castle.<sup>1</sup> The aspect of it 'stifled' him. 'The men in the zebra clothes' saddened him. He 'panted to be out again.' His whole expression of face was disturbed as he talked of them, and he kept shuddering.

"He wished to go and see Yarmouth, but Whitwell discouraged him, and told him there was nothing to see there. 'I want to see the Great Ocean; I want to see where Peggotty lived.'"

Whitwell Elwin's sterling abilities naturally pointed him out for some position of importance. His friends thought him wasted at Booton. Lord Brougham told Lady Westmorland that it put him in a rage that a man such as he was should be buried in a village. His gloomy spirits in 1857 seemed an additional motive for trying to remove

<sup>1</sup> Then used as the county gaol.

him to some more social sphere of work. He, however, had always stood out resolutely against the arguments of those who wished to get him preferment. In the spring of 1857, Lord Brougham,—who had been seriously ill and was anxious to move in the matter before he died,—wrote to Lord Palmerston, without Elwin's knowledge, to urge his suitability for some Crown appointment. The first intimation Elwin had of this was that Lord Brougham wrote and told him that he had written twice to the Prime Minister on the subject, that Lord Palmerston had answered neither of the letters, and that he therefore intended to call upon him.<sup>1</sup> Elwin instantly begged Lord Brougham to withdraw the application, representing to him, as he had often done before, that "such a request to a Whig minister for the editor of a Conservative journal" put him into a "painful position." Brougham answered, "I entirely differ from you about Pam and Church preferment, and I have this morning been with him, and entered fully into the subject."<sup>2</sup> This occurred not long after the publication in the Quarterly of the attack on the Government, in the article written by Gladstone. Adverting to this, Lord Palmerston observed to Lord Brougham that it scarcely entitled the editor of the Review for promotion from *him*. Lord Brougham, who had no information as to the authorship of the paper, replied that Elwin had lately been ill, and hazarded the conjecture that it might have found its way into the Quarterly without his authority, but added that, if this was not the true explanation, "it was a prodigious thing to have an adversary full of candour and firmness, and incapable of either violence or trick." "Palmerston

<sup>1</sup> Lord Brougham to Elwin, June 1, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> Elwin to Murray, June 6, 1857.

at once," said Lord Brougham, "adopted this view, and therefore I am still by no means without hopes."<sup>1</sup>

Having failed to influence Lord Brougham directly, Elwin applied to Lady Westmorland to use her influence with him to withdraw the request. "I shudder," he said, "at the idea of appearing to have sanctioned such a proceeding. Moreover, I do not want any promotion, and if it was offered I should refuse it. I know too well how much happiness depends upon domestic quiet ever to be tempted to leave my present secluded nook."<sup>2</sup> When Lady Westmorland spoke to Lord Brougham on the subject, he told her, "with glee," that he had just repeated his application in the strongest manner. "Withdraw it, indeed!" he exclaimed. "Why it is the kindest act I can do to Pam to give him an opportunity of promoting a man on the sole ground of excellence and ability! It is the very thing he wants to wipe out the reproach of many promotions to the Bench of a different character. And, as to my friend Elwin's scruples, they are based upon a fallacy. He says the Q. R. politics are different from Pam's. Not a bit of it. Pam is of anybody's politics, and if he *has* any opinions, they are more those of the Q. R. than any other."<sup>3</sup> Elwin's remonstrance only made Lord Brougham more pertinacious than before, and induced him to seek support by enlisting the help of Lord Shaftesbury, "who," he said, "is supposed to influence the clerical appointments." Lord Brougham impressed on him that the "giving everything to low churchmen, and making no exceptions, was most injurious" to Lord Palmerston's position. Lord Brougham reported that Lord Shaftesbury "spoke most fairly and candidly on the

<sup>1</sup> Lord Brougham to Elwin, June 11, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, June 5, 1857.

<sup>3</sup> The Countess of Westmorland to Elwin, June, 1857.



subject."<sup>1</sup> Elwin at last had recourse to the Duke of Bedford, and succeeded in getting him to convey a private intimation to Lord Palmerston that he was not a candidate for promotion, and wished that the matter should be dropped.<sup>2</sup>

When Murray heard that the proposal was on foot, he began to fear that Elwin's connection with the Quarterly might stand in the way of his advancement at the hands of a Whig ministry, and wrote him a letter, begging him not to sacrifice his own interests to those of the Review. Elwin soon satisfied his generous publisher's mind on that score. "I want no preferment," he said, "and will take none either from Lord Palmerston or anybody else. I love my own quiet and retired life, and have a fixed resolution never to be drawn from it."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless he was glad that the actual offer was never made, "for things," he said, "are sometimes a temptation when they come, and friends always advise in one direction, and overrule what one may feel in a matter of this kind to be one's own better judgment."<sup>4</sup>

Up to this time Whitwell Elwin had had no personal acquaintance with Lord Shaftesbury, but they met shortly after, at Forster's, where they dined together on Sunday, July 12th, 1857, and then went to Exeter Hall, to hear Hugh M'Neile preach. Forster thought "his power of speaking without a note, and logically pressing an argument, absolutely astonishing."<sup>5</sup> Elwin, on the other hand, considered "the sermon was tolerable, but not extraordinary." What impressed him, as he viewed the congregation of three or four thousand people from the platform, was the "sea of human countenances turned up

<sup>1</sup> Lord Brougham to Elwin, June 10, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> Elwin to Murray, June, 1857.

<sup>3</sup> To Murray, June 6, 1857.

<sup>4</sup> The same, June 16, 1857.

<sup>5</sup> MS. Diary.

to the preacher." "I never before," he said, "felt in the same degree the importance of the Christian minister's mission, when the weal or woe of such a multitude depended upon his message. It carried the mind to reflect upon the innumerable beings which composed the world, of the infinity which had existed since the first creation of the universe, and the tremendousness of that day when the whole would be assembled before the judgment-seat of Christ."<sup>1</sup>

In the autumn of 1857 he was still very poorly and depressed. "I have had a sort of languor upon me," he wrote to Murray in November. He was, indeed, seriously unstrung and nervous. "Three of my clerical neighbours," he wrote a few days later, "have died within the last three weeks, and all so suddenly that they each performed their duty on the Sunday preceding their death. This makes us feel sad, and agitates me a good deal." One of the three was his old tutor, "Parson" Blake, of Thurning, "a very old friend," he said, "and an admirable man."<sup>2</sup> In spite of his dejection, however, he applied himself busily to the work for the December number of the Review, contributing to it an original and sprightly article on the "Sense of Pain in Men and Animals," "most of it done," he said, "under the influence of the subject of which it treats."<sup>3</sup>

His spirits always revived when he met Thackeray. He dined with him at Forster's, on January 6th, 1858. He did not know he was to be there, and on seeing him in the room, he exclaimed, and ran up to greet him before he had spoken to Mrs. Forster. Forster remonstrated, and said it was not like him to do it. "Oh! yes, it is," said Thackeray, and then turning to him added, "Never mind,

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, July 16, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, Dec. 4, 1857.

<sup>3</sup> The same, Dec., 1857.

*I forgive you.*" At dinner Elwin told Thackeray that his best poem was that on his pen. "I cannot give you the pen with which I wrote it," Thackeray replied, "for I let it fall at Naples, and broke it, but I will give you the pencil-case." Thereupon he took a silver pencil-case, with a gold pen, from his pocket, and put it into Elwin's hands. It was the pencil-case which the novelist had used for years, and it was the pen with which he had written many of his works. Elwin was so rapturous over the gift that Forster declared indignantly he would never invite him and Thackeray together again. The pen was treasured at Booton for the rest of Elwin's life as his most valued possession.

After the dinner at Forster's, Thackeray and Elwin left together. On their way home Thackeray talked of the Virginians, which was then in its early stages. He said he meant to bring in Goldsmith,—“representing him as he really was, a little, shabby, mean, shuffling Irishman,”—Garrick—whose laugh he was positive he should be able to identify from the look in his portrait—Dr. Johnson, and the other celebrities of the reign of Queen Anne.<sup>1</sup> He thought that he should find this easy, but he afterwards told Elwin that he had discovered he could not do it. The failure of his design threw him out, and the second half of the novel dragged for lack of materials.

On February 21st, 1858, to the joy of the Elwins, another daughter was safely born. She was named Frances Margaret. "This new-comer," wrote the father, "seems, as by magic, to have obliterated the past, and for the first time for a whole year I see that the good mother is truly happy."<sup>2</sup> "The baby," he added some months later, "is the stoutest child we have ever had, and

<sup>1</sup> Elwin to his wife, Jan. 7, 1858.

<sup>2</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, Feb. 22, 1858.



like all our bairns, the image of its mother, which is a good thing for the bairns.”<sup>1</sup> Under the influence of this happy gratification, Elwin began to regain his placidity, and returned to his work with more sense of capacity than he had felt for many months past.

The year 1858 was notable in the Review work for the most stormy controversy of Elwin's period of editorship. As has been seen already, his toleration of various parties within the Church did not extend to extreme high churchmen. He had not studied their views very closely, and he adopted the common impression that their tenets tended perilously towards Roman Catholicism. With that form of religion he had no sympathy. “This is certain,” he wrote in 1852, “that the Roman Catholic system is less successful in making men *good* than the Protestant, so that even if there was virtue in their forms of worship, it is at least insufficient to counteract their errors of doctrine.”<sup>2</sup> The Papal aggression of 1850 had alarmed the minds, and irritated the feelings, of churchmen, and it was not unnatural that advances like those of the Tractarians should be popularly received at first with a good deal of suspicion. Consequently, Elwin began to admit into the Review rather bitter paragraphs on high churchmen and their practices. Unfortunately, the writers were not very learned on their subject, and some of their diatribes displayed a want of information which occasionally became ludicrous. At last, in January, 1858, there appeared an article on “Church Extension,” which definitely charged the Theological College of Cuddesdon, in the diocese of Oxford, with “ostentatious playing at Romanism.” The reviewer spoke against the Cuddesdon Chapel as “fitted up with fantastic decoration,” its “altar

<sup>1</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, May 7, 1858.

<sup>2</sup> To Miss Holley, June 12, 1852.

adorned with flowers, surmounted with lights, covered with a lace-bordered napkin." He described the "service of the Sacrament" in it as "attended with rinsings of cups in the newly revived piscina, with genuflexions and other ceremonial acts which are foreign to our ritual and usages"; and, in addition to all this, complained of the use of "a service book concocted from the seven canonical hours of the Romish Church."<sup>1</sup>

The Rev. C. P. Golightly, of Oriel College, Oxford, immediately followed up the Quarterly assault by a circular letter based upon it, addressed to the Clergy and Laity of the Diocese of Oxford. The two attacks made a commotion which would seem extravagant in these days. The Bishop of Oxford appointed his three archdeacons as commissioners to inquire into the charges of Romanising at Cuddesdon. They entirely exonerated the college of any such tendency. When their Report appeared, Bishop Phillpotts, of Exeter, tried to bring private pressure to bear upon Murray, to induce him to withdraw or modify the accusations in the Review, while Gladstone made a similar effort with the editor. When the writer of the article learnt what a hornets' nest he had stirred up, he took alarm, especially as he found himself unable to substantiate all he had stated, based as it was upon hearsay, on a subject of which he did not understand the terminology. He wrote such contradictory and timid epistles that the editor found he could not depend on him to fight his own battle at all. He therefore took up the cudgels himself, and wrote a letter to the Principal of Cuddesdon, the Rev. A. Pott, afterwards Archdeacon of Berkshire, stating the main points of objection, in such a form as might "draw forth a reply and explanation" which would afford secure ground from

<sup>1</sup> *Quarterly Review*, vol. ciii. p. 162.

which to pursue the contest.<sup>1</sup> "I am sure," Elwin wrote to Murray, "I can make good our position, and show the danger of the Cuddesdon system. . . . There is no doubt it is a semi Roman Catholic College. . . . I think we can crush the Bishop of Oxford."<sup>2</sup> His fighting blood was up. He sent a second formal letter to the Principal, reiterating the charges of Romanism, and giving him leave to print it. As the Cuddesdon authorities did not do this, he had it printed himself for private circulation. "The Tractarian party," he wrote to Murray, "is the most unpopular in England, and the least influential. The country will never put up with it, and I have no sort of intention of espousing a cause of which I entirely disapprove. I am willing that it should be tolerated while it keeps within the limits of Protestantism, but I could never become its mouthpiece."<sup>3</sup>

He rather resented Gladstone's interference, especially because he surmised that he had been set on to it by the Bishop of Oxford, which he thought "unhandsome." Gladstone wrote cautiously, not entering into the merits of the question, but praising the Bishop and the general way in which he ruled his diocese. "If," he said, "you should find it to be in your power to set him in any manner straight with your readers, you will be doing that which I am convinced his character as the governor of a diocese deserves. It is in that character that I most admire him."<sup>4</sup> The editor replied by accusations of Romanism, which Gladstone allowed were expressed "in a spirit of delicacy and of justice," but which he proceeded to contest diplomatically. "I feel perfectly convinced," he said, "that if you knew the Bishop of Oxford as I do, and saw the *working* of his whole system, inside and out, you

<sup>1</sup> Elwin to Murray, 1858.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Feb. 27, 1858.

<sup>3</sup> The same, March 5, 1858.

<sup>4</sup> Gladstone to Elwin, March 2, 1858.



would acquit both him and all he does of that tendency, as well as that intention, even if you differed, as you might, upon this or that particular. The fruit of his government seems really to have been to have put out and extinguished the whole Romanising sentiment (I speak confidently in general terms, though, of course, I cannot know whether an exception may be found) wherever his influence extends.”<sup>1</sup>

A month later, on April 12th, 1858, when the next number of the Review was on the eve of publication, Gladstone had a long conversation with the editor in London on the subject. Elwin was then willing to insert an explanatory Note in the Quarterly, to some extent modifying the charges that had been made, and he discussed its form with Gladstone, who afterwards wrote a report of his interview to the Bishop of Oxford, in which he said, “I do not doubt that you will be spoken of in just and proper terms.” The Note, which was published in the Review did not allude to the Bishop. It simply referred readers to the pamphlet containing the Archdeacons’ Report, without expressing any opinion upon it. It did, however, convey a retraction of the offensive passages in the Quarterly paper: “As our assertions have been supposed to imply a belief that Roman Catholic doctrines were favoured at the College, it is necessary that we should state that no such suspicion entered our minds. The questions were purely questions of ritual, upon which there is, and always has been, great difference of opinion within the English Church; and though we retain the same sentiments that we expressed in the Article, we entirely acquit the authorities of entertaining any ulterior or covert designs.”<sup>2</sup> Considering how vehemently the editor had espoused the attack, the Note justified Gladstone’s

<sup>1</sup> The same, March 5, 1858.

<sup>2</sup> *Quarterly Review*, vol. ciii. p. 574.

opinion of him expressed to Bishop Wilberforce: "Elwin is a man on whose fairness in a matter of honour I should greatly rely."<sup>1</sup>

No ill will remained on either side. "You will be surprised to hear," Elwin wrote to a friend, February 20th, 1860, "that I have struck up a sort of intimacy with my old foe, the Bishop of Oxford. I cannot say that I believe in him, and yet he is so cordial and agreeable that it is difficult not to like him." A good deal of correspondence passed between them, and the Bishop began to contribute to the *Quarterly Review* before Elwin resigned the editorship. Still later, when they came to know one another as fellow-guests in country houses, they greatly enjoyed each other's society. Eventually, Elwin sent two of his sons to Cuddesdon. The College at that time congratulated itself on having much more than recovered the usages which had temporarily been abandoned in deference to the *Quarterly* and *Golightly* attacks. Elwin scarcely realised that his own views had advanced since he championed the assault, and believed that the malpractices were things of the past. "Cuddesdon," he wrote to Murray, "is admirable now. A Mr. King<sup>2</sup> is the Principal. He is venerated by the students, and authorities and students live as one family. The ultra-ritualism has long ceased. The place realises the ideal vision of what a college should be."<sup>3</sup> He had at the outset been misled by his ill-informed contributors.

In the arena of secular politics the *Review* continued to hold a more cautious position than it had momentarily assumed in 1858 on religious polemics. The interest attaching to the Indian Mutiny in a measure obviated the necessity of dealing much with party affairs. But when the Palmerston Ministry was on the wane, the editor

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Bishop Wilberforce*, vol. ii. pp. 364, 365.

<sup>2</sup> The present Bishop of Lincoln.

<sup>3</sup> To Murray, Dec. 4, 1869.

conceived that the Quarterly must give a qualified support to Lord Derby.<sup>1</sup> He still kept up his communications with Gladstone, with the hope that he might declare himself a Conservative. But Gladstone held back. "I know no more than you," Elwin wrote to Murray early in 1858, "what views Gladstone holds. My impression is that he is Conservative and not Whig. But we shall see."<sup>2</sup> He hoped a little later that there was truth in the rumour that Gladstone was going to join Lord Derby's administration.<sup>3</sup> Disraeli was, however, a member of the new Government, and this was sufficient to make Gladstone's position in it impossible. Elwin took his own stand against Disraeli's ideas with regard to electoral reform. So strongly did he feel upon this point that he departed from his usual habit of not interfering publicly in political questions, and attended a meeting in Norwich, on December 18th, 1858, where he moved a resolution, which was carried unanimously, that the Conservatives should not support Sir Henry Stracey as a candidate, because he had declared for the ballot. This Elwin regarded as a piece of "suicidal folly."<sup>4</sup> He himself wrote an article against Reform for the December number, to replace one that was a failure, and which he described as "a kind of Pinnock's Catechism of the British Constitution."

The personal relations between Elwin and Gladstone remained cordial for some time. Gladstone still wrote for the Quarterly, both on political and other subjects; but, so far as politics were concerned, with extreme secrecy, lest he should embarrass both himself and the Review. Before Elwin resigned his editorship, however, the statesman had finally thrown in his lot with the Liberal party, and he and Elwin necessarily saw less of each other.

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, March 2, 1858.

<sup>2</sup> The same, March 2, 1858.

<sup>3</sup> The same, May 29, 1858.

<sup>4</sup> The same, Dec. 21, 1858.



Elwin greatly disagreed with Gladstone's later opinions, and almost forgot in after days how high he had rated him for a time.

Some of Elwin's finest essays were contributed during this year of his revived energy. In April, 1858, and January, 1859, there appeared his two notable articles on Dr. Johnson. His second article on Sir Charles Napier was also published in October, 1858. Sir William Napier had been a little disappointed at the delay in its preparation, caused by Elwin's indisposition in 1857, but a visit to the general at Scinde House, Clapham, on May 14th, 1858, had put him into the humour for writing it. On this occasion there was a long talk on military affairs. "Sir William," Elwin wrote, in relating it, "says that Marlborough was a greater general than the Duke of Wellington, nor does he think Marlborough was ever equalled except by Hannibal.<sup>1</sup> He once asked the Duke of Wellington whether he thought Marlborough greatest as a general or a politician. 'As a general,' the Duke replied, 'for whenever he writes on politics he writes like a man who is fearful, and uncertain what to do; but whenever he writes on military affairs he writes with calmness and decision, as if he had neither doubt nor difficulty, and therefore I conclude that he understood his military business best.' He also asked the Duke if he believed the stories of Marlborough's protracting the war with France, as his enemies alleged, for the sake of keeping his pay as commander. 'No,' said the Duke, 'certainly

<sup>1</sup> To General Shaw Kennedy, Sir William Napier wrote, May 15, 1853, that he did not think Marlborough a greater general than the Duke of Wellington, but a man of finer genius. He named Hannibal, Napoleon, Alexander, and Cæsar as the four whom he considered the greatest generals the world had seen, and whom he ranked in the order in which he placed their names.—*Life of Sir W. P. Napier*, edited by H. A. Bruce, vol. ii. pp. 339, 340.

not. He might be capable of any meanness to advance his wife at Court, but he was incapable of sacrificing his military reputation. He was too great a master of his art to have been able to endure the thought of such a thing!"<sup>1</sup>

Elwin took his article on Sir Charles Napier down to Clapham on October 14th, to receive Sir William's opinion on it. Describing his visit to Murray, he wrote, "He is still confined to his couch, but even in his sickness presents the most magnificent specimen of an heroic countenance I ever saw. No sculptor or painter could frame a more perfect ideal of a warrior's face. His long grey hair and beard add to the impression. When I said, 'How do you do, general? I hope you are better,' he answered, 'No,' with the vehement tone of a man ordering a regiment to charge. This is his common way of talking. Yet he is as affectionate and kind, with all his impetuosity, as a tender-hearted woman. The Napiers are a grand and gallant race, and I both admire and love them."<sup>2</sup>

The article on Sir Charles had given Elwin considerable trouble, for the narrative in the Biography was so disjointed that it took time and study to frame a conception of the Indian campaigns and battles. The result was, however, highly successful. It was thought to equal the first essay in brilliancy, and the family and friends were so pleased with it that they set on foot a project for reprinting 10,000 or 20,000 copies for distribution. This was not carried out, but a scheme for revising and enlarging the two Napier papers for separate publication was long kept under consideration.

<sup>1</sup> Elwin to his wife, May 15, 1858; to the Countess of Westmorland, May 30, 1858.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, Oct. 20, 1858.

## CHAPTER IX

1858

OVERWORK—THE EDITION OF POPE UNDERTAKEN—  
PROPOSED RESIGNATION FROM THE QUARTERLY  
REVIEW EDITORSHIP—LORD BROUGHAM AND LORD  
LYNDHURST.

ELWIN'S life had now become so overwhelmingly full of occupations that it was undergoing a strain which no one could stand. He had his clerical, his literary, and his social spheres, each of which, in the way that he did his work, would by itself have been enough. The combination harassed him, not only because the hours of the day were insufficient for its calls, but also because these calls were so many-sided that he had constantly to leave some things unfinished while he attended to the demands of others. Some natures can turn readily from one avocation to another, giving each in succession its share of exclusive attention. This Elwin could not do. He devoted his mind so thoroughly to whatever he was engaged upon that he could not easily take up anything else until it was done. Multitudinous trains of thought and simultaneous duties pressed on him uncomfortably.

The ministry of a rector in a small and obscure village might seem calculated to leave ample leisure for other pursuits. The life of a country parson who does not neglect his parish, differs, however, from that of his town



brother more in the nature than the amount of his work. Everything depends on himself, and much that is rightly performed by pious lay people in larger populations must be done by the clergyman in the country, or not done at all. Moreover, the fulfilment of the clerical function requires too continuous a residence to be made conveniently compatible with extraneous employments requiring attendance at specified dates.

All this Elwin felt keenly. His parish was his first charge, which could not be neglected for anything outside it. The editing of the *Quarterly Review* necessitated periodic visits to London, but he always made these as short as possible. For his people, owing to his unavoidable absences, he engaged the services of a Scripture Reader; and, if he was obliged to be away for a Sunday, he paid a substitute to fill his place. But he disliked ministering by deputy, and he often came back on a Saturday, even when it involved travelling by night, with a hasty return to town on the Monday morning. If there was serious illness in the village, he always refused to leave, even for the requirements of the *Review*. This sense of duty prevailed sometimes even when the claim was not so paramount as in the case of his own parishioners. "I shall not leave home to-day, as I intended," he wrote to Murray on one occasion. "A neighbouring clergyman is dangerously ill—perhaps dying—and as his family have no one except myself on whom to lean in their trouble, I cannot think of stirring."<sup>1</sup>

The nature of Elwin's friendships made them almost as exacting as the pastoral charge of his parish. He was so sympathetic and wise a counsellor that people learnt to trust him with all their affairs. He was not infrequently summoned, by letter or telegram, to advise in

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Oct. 19, 1858.

some case of difficulty, almost as imperiously as a physician is called to visit a patient. If it was possible, he would invariably comply, at any sacrifice to himself, though the demand often proved to be in excess of the need. "I have been leading a very unsettled life," he wrote to Lady Westmorland, in the summer of 1858, "going hither and thither, and for the most part in obedience to some call of duty and not of pleasure."<sup>1</sup> The complication only increased as time went on. "I have never been so hurried," he wrote, in July, 1858, "in any visit to London. Every time I come here I make fresh acquaintances, and the claims upon me grow more and more numerous. I am at this moment running a race against time. This is the way in London. At every corner of the street you meet an acquaintance, and everyone has his own little tale to tell." "I have lived in such a whirl of business, visits, and dinners," he wrote the following spring, "that I have lost all sense of the lapse of time, and all power of separating the items which compose the confused mass. I feel as if I had been an age from home, and as if my return was endlessly postponed. I am sick to be back."<sup>2</sup> When he was liberated from London, it was not even to retire to a rest in which he could recruit. "When I get home," he wrote, two weeks later, "after a fortnight's absence, I find such an accumulation of petty business that I am a slave to it for the next few days."<sup>3</sup> Then came the new flow of interruptions, the next number of the Review relentlessly pursuing him, and the ever-growing multiplication of demands on his time.

Nor was the Quarterly Review the only literary task

<sup>1</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, Aug. 27, 1858.

<sup>2</sup> To Miss Holley, July 10, 1858; April 16, 1859.

<sup>3</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, April 29, 1859.

that was pressing upon him now. He had added to it another, the extent and burden of which was to exceed anything that he contemplated when he first undertook it. This was the editing of the Works of Alexander Pope.

An edition of Pope had been promised in Murray's lists of forthcoming books for a great many years. In their very early married days, Whitwell Elwin and his wife had looked into a bookseller's window, in Bath, and discussed whether they should buy a copy of the poet's works which was on show there. They decided that, as a new edition to be edited by Croker was advertised, it would be better to wait for that. In 1853 it was rumoured that Croker had so nearly finished it that Elwin inquired of Murray the exact date when it might be expected, with a view to writing an article on it. "You know," he said, "I have long wished to make it the text of an essay for the Q. R., and not having begun anything for the summer number, I should jump at this favourite topic, *if* your edition will be out in time."<sup>1</sup>

Croker, however, had only accumulated materials, without putting them into shape. "He played with the subject," Elwin said, "as long as he lived, but never executed his task."<sup>2</sup> At last his health broke down so completely that it was out of the question that he should ever accomplish the work by himself. In 1856 Murray asked Elwin if he would come to the rescue, supposing Croker were willing to accept his help. Elwin replied, "If he would relinquish the task I see no difficulty in beginning the publication four months hence. I have so long been familiar with every line of Pope that to-

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, March 5, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, Nov. 24, 1858.



digest and to condense the matter would be no difficult task, but rather a recreation.”<sup>1</sup> He had little idea then what a long and tedious drag upon his life this supposed “recreation” was going to be. His notion was that the editorial work would consist of very little more than revising the notes of predecessors. “The poetry of Pope,” he said, “has been annotated by so many persons, and some of them so able and well-read (especially Warton), that there is more to be done in the way of selection and condensation than in new discoveries. No notes should be retained except those which really elucidate the text. Nothing could be worse than to make (as Warton and Warburton constantly did) the allusions of Pope a peg upon which to hang their own reading.”<sup>2</sup> The comment is interesting, because the exhaustive introductions and notes which he eventually contributed to the edition are open to a kindred, though not quite identical, criticism.

Croker was unwilling to retire, and there was again a year’s delay. The matter was revived in 1857, when Elwin suggested that John Forster should take up the preparation of the edition. Circumstances, however, prevented this, and at last it was arranged that Croker should remain the ostensible editor, but that the chief work should be done by Peter Cunningham and Whitwell Elwin in conjunction. Croker’s manuscript annotations were handed over to the latter, who found them more voluminous than useful. “A few,” he said, “are of value. The rest are mere repetitions of other men’s labours, or are intrinsically worthless.”<sup>3</sup> And, though a further study made him write, later on, “He had accomplished much more than I supposed,”<sup>4</sup> this was only a

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, April 22, 1856

<sup>2</sup> The same.

<sup>3</sup> The same, May 20, 1857.

<sup>4</sup> The same, undated

modification, and not a recantation, of his first opinion. "His diligence was great," he wrote to Murray, "but he worked upon a system the most wasteful of time of any which I ever remember to have seen, and which sufficiently explains why he never brought his edition to a conclusion. He seems to have loved the work of preparation, and to have shrunk from the work of execution."<sup>1</sup> Elwin, however, thought that there were "hints enough in Croker's memoranda for notes to make the edition appear in the main his";<sup>2</sup> but there was nothing ready for the press, unless it was an Introduction, which had assumed a fairly definite shape.

Croker had kept this Introduction to himself until he knew, in the summer of 1857, that his end was approaching rapidly, and then he wrote to Murray, on the 18th of July, "I have sent to-day to the printer the whole of the Essay in a condition to which you may affix my name if I should not happen to be able to give it the final imprimatur. But if I should not be able to put the last hand to it, I would beg of you to ask our friend Mr. Elwin to run his eye over it, with a view to softening any too sharp expressions that I may have used as to the former editors. My style is naturally too sharp, and sharper than perhaps I am conscious of, and, therefore, in leaving this paper behind me, I am anxious that it should contain no offensive expressions, and, if there be any such, a few touches of Mr. Elwin's discreet pen would supply something equally forcible, and not liable to the reproach of being harsh." This was the last letter that Croker wrote to Murray, if not the last that he penned at all. He died on the 10th of August. Relating the circumstance to Lord Brougham, Elwin wrote, "This I report to you as being extremely creditable to him. As

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Sept. 7, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> The same.

the persons of whom he speaks in the essay have all long been dead, and have left no descendants who could be wounded by his animadversions, it is the stronger proof of the sensitiveness of his feelings at the last, upon a point in which he is considered to have been somewhat reckless in former days.”<sup>1</sup>

The letter was honourable to Croker in another way also. It was generous in its appreciation of Elwin, who had brought his position on the Quarterly Review staff to an end a few years before. Elwin was in London when Murray received the message and preface, and he read them at Albemarle Street. He was much touched by the terms in which Croker spoke of him, and wrote home to his wife at Booton, “I look upon this note, written with his dying hand, as a sort of legacy, and shall do my best in the revision of his paper, if it is to be published, but I hope to persuade Murray and his family to suppress it. It will do him no credit, or rather it will be injurious to his reputation. It is the concentration of his faults, with none of his merits.” This was the conclusion in which advisers agreed, and the essay was not preserved. But Croker’s letter had a more far-reaching effect than merely the disposition of his introductory essay. It made Elwin feel that, not only the note, but also the whole edition of Pope’s Works, had become a kind of trust which he must fulfil. Exactly as he had drifted into becoming editor of the Quarterly through Lockhart’s illness and death, so now, through Croker’s illness and death, he had drifted into becoming the editor of Pope. The two works also followed a precisely similar course in their execution. As with the Quarterly, so with Pope, there was the same brilliant literary skill, marred by very much the same defects of literary habits, the same

<sup>1</sup> To Lord Brougham, Sept. 21, 1857.



burdensomeness of the task, the same efforts to get rid of it, and a very parallel termination at last.

The editor had at first no fear that he could combine the annotation of Pope with the management of the Review. In the autumn of 1857 he wrote, "I have gone over the printed notes of all the editions of Pope, and erased what seemed superfluous, which amounts to nine-tenths of the whole; I have put Croker's notes into shape, and I have added such notes of my own as I was able to supply. I have gone over those of Roscoe's eight-volume edition, and shall have given the final touch to this portion in three weeks from this time."<sup>1</sup> He suggested that Peter Cunningham should in these three weeks be preparing "any new explanations of his own," so that some volumes might at once go to press. The difficulties of double editorship were not long in presenting themselves, with the result that Cunningham was persuaded to retire. He withdrew somewhat against his will, as he indicated by protesting that a clergyman was not a proper person to edit Pope. "I suppose," remarked Elwin, in reply to the objection, "that men make good or bad editors according to their capacities and not according to their professions; but, if the profession has indeed anything to do with the matter, I think that Warburton, Warton, and Bowles have no need to fear comparison with the editor of the Letters of Horace Walpole,"—in other words, with Peter Cunningham.<sup>2</sup>

The work, which had seemed easy at the outset, grew more and more complicated as it went on. The first checks came in connection with Pope's letters. Among the objects of curious inquiry which attracted that ingenious critic, Charles Wentworth Dilke,<sup>3</sup> the disingenuous-

<sup>1</sup> To Murray [1857].

<sup>2</sup> The same, June 2, 1858.

<sup>3</sup> Editor of the *Athenaeum* for some years, and afterwards a contributor to its pages, on Junius, Pope, etc.

ness of Pope in regard to the printing of his correspondence was one that occupied several years of his life. He had printed some of his detections in the *Athenæum* during 1854, and had since continued pursuing his investigations, with further results. These opened up a vista of tedious examinations of books and documents. Dilke, whose advancing years had alone prevented his taking a formal part in the preparation of Murray's edition of Pope, put all his information at Elwin's disposal, and assisted him in many ways, but this did not obviate the necessity for independent scrutiny and wider research. New collections of Pope's manuscript letters also kept coming to light, at once elucidating and confusing the problems which an editor had to solve. The time consumed on preliminary study was, therefore, considerable, and the longer the work was on hand, the more distant seemed the day when any of it would be ready for publication. By the close of 1858 Elwin had begun to realise the magnitude of the undertaking, which he felt it impossible to escape from, and yet for which the *Quarterly Review* allowed him inadequate leisure.

As if his compulsory employments were not already more than enough, Elwin was easily persuaded into adding to them. He felt under obligations to his own locality, and preached occasional sermons, especially for his friend Mr. Holley. He also presided from time to time over Benefit Society dinners, which, with him, involved the careful preparation of speeches; and most winters, at this period, he gave one or two lectures at the neighbouring little town of Reepham. Sometimes, indeed, he would take the subject of one of his *Review* articles, which provided him with materials, though he always worked them up afresh. He used his essays on the *Sense of Pain* and on *Dr. Johnson* in this way. At other times he would take

some fresh topic which he thought would suit the tastes of a popular audience. Thus he chose *Habit* for a lecture in 1859. This was got ready in less than a week, and one or two others, in special emergencies, were prepared even more rapidly. Rapidity did not mean, however, that they were delivered off-hand, but rather that the preparation had been condensed, by an immense effort, into a surprisingly short time. It was his common practice to write and revise his lectures in much the same manner as he drew up a paper for the press. If he had time, he would also learn the whole by heart, that the delivery might not be impeded by the reading of a manuscript. He did this with his long lecture on Johnson, which occupied a couple of hours, and afterwards described his discomfort at one point when he forgot his cue, and had to improvise a few sentences while his mind was regaining it. Everything he undertook was done in a manner which cost a great deal of exertion.

Amidst this busy life, Elwin's versatile mind was always open to new interests, which were sometimes of a most unexpected kind. An instance, to illustrate this, occurred in 1858. Early in that year Rarey, the American horse-tamer, came to England on a commercial visit. His system was kept a mystery, in order to excite curiosity; and, to secure his receipts, he opened a subscription list before he began to exhibit. As the list filled up slowly, he endeavoured to give it an impetus by inviting a select number of persons to a private exhibition, which he called a "lesson." The editor of the *Quarterly Review* was one of those who received an invitation, and he accepted it. He was the only cleric present, and the only person who was not in some way or other associated with horsemanship. The others were nearly all prominent members of society, who were either cavalry officers, or had some



connection with the racing and hunting world. Nevertheless Elwin entered into the performance as keenly as any of them, and came away enthusiastic, possessed of a set of "Rarey straps" for his own purposes. "I was delighted," he wrote to Lady Westmorland, "with Mr. Rarey's horsetaming. His system in its separate parts has been long known, but nobody has put them together before, or used them to produce the same results. Like every discovery, the germs are to be found pre-existing. To be gentle to the horse makes up so large a part of his doctrine that humanity will be an enormous gainer by his method."<sup>1</sup> Elwin possessed no horses, but was so eager to put his acquisition to use that when he returned to Booton he undertook to cure one of a farmer's cobs of a trick of shying. He had no particular knowledge of horses, and his one qualification for the task was that he possessed great muscular strength. The process consisted in strapping up both the forelegs of the horse and making him fight on his knees until he was too exhausted to go on. Helpless as, in some respects, the animal was, without the use of two of his legs, it required considerable skill and experience in the "tamer" to conduct the contest either successfully or safely. As Rarey's pupils had been pledged to secrecy until his public exhibitions began, the interview between the rector and the cob was in private. What happened was never revealed, but the Rarey straps were soon relegated to a lumber-room. It was as well they should be, or he would have been involved in some more dangerous conflict than that of his first experiment. "I have tried the system myself a few times," he wrote gaily to Lady Westmorland, "and found it answered perfectly, but it is very hard work, at least to me. As the report spread, all the vicious horses for miles round were brought

<sup>1</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, April 19, 1858.

to me, which obliged me to make a resolution to abandon the practice, or my life would have been spent in horse-taming."<sup>1</sup>

The summer of 1858 brought the usual influx of visitors, but this year their host welcomed them more cheerfully than he had been able to do in 1857. Among them was Mrs. Austin, the translator, and wife of John Austin, the well-known jurist. She was a native of Norfolk, her father having been John Taylor, of Norwich. "She is very kind and worthy," Elwin wrote to Murray. "Yesterday we went on a pilgrimage to the place where her father was at school a hundred years ago. We first found out the name of the schoolmaster, by a search among the grave-stones, and next learnt, by a lingering tradition among the elders of the village, the house where he went to school. It was really quite touching to see how affected the good old lady was at standing in the scene of her father's boyhood, and recalling the traits of his worth and affection."<sup>2</sup>

Best of all, Mr. and Mrs. Murray, with their children, spent a few delightful days at Booton. When the visit was proposed, Elwin wrote, "Mrs. Elwin insists that I should inform Mrs. Murray that our house is neither painted nor furnished, for fear she should be beguiled into the expectation of comforts that do not yet exist here. But, if she will excuse these deficiencies, we shall be charmed to have her for a guest."<sup>3</sup> Murray was one of the most genial of holiday-makers; and, happily combining business with pleasure, made his stay an opportunity for revising his Handbook for Norfolk. A carriage and pair was engaged for the week, and each morning he and Elwin, accompanied by some of the rest of the

<sup>1</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, May 7, 1858.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, Aug. 3, 1858.

<sup>3</sup> The same.

party, drove to one of the country-seats or places of interest in the neighbourhood, red book in hand, full of talk and friendship. Elwin wrote to him afterwards, "I cannot tell you with how much regret we saw you all depart, or how great has been the gratification of your visit. It is a bright spot in our lives. Mrs. Elwin, the children, and myself, were all alike delighted, and it is a pleasure which we hope will be often and often renewed."<sup>1</sup> In December of the same year the cordial relationships between the publisher and editor of the Quarterly were further cemented by Elwin becoming godfather to Murray's youngest daughter. He made a special journey to Wimbledon for the purpose. "I cannot," he said, "deny myself the satisfaction of being present at the christening. It would destroy so much of the pleasure of the association if I was not at the ceremony."<sup>2</sup>

It was not to be wondered at if the Review sometimes showed signs of the pressure of Elwin's overcrowded existence. The standard of the articles was maintained, but Murray thought that faulty sentences and misprints sometimes crept into the papers for want of due time for their revision. He suggested that the work for each number should be commenced in better time. "I quite agree," replied the editor, "that it is desirable to have a good portion of the Review in shape at an earlier period, and this I will endeavour to accomplish. But the result will always develop itself most towards the end, inasmuch as the study of a subject gives six times as much trouble as the putting it on paper, and in review-writing a fresh subject has to be investigated every quarter, besides the necessity of looking into the topics treated by the other contributors. However, as I said, there is room for im-

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Aug. 30, 1858.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Nov. 29, 1858.



provement in this respect, and I have no doubt I can apply a remedy."<sup>1</sup>

The remedy was not so easy to find as to promise, and Elwin failed in the attempt. As the next number was in course of preparation, in December, 1858, he wrote to Murray: "I inwardly made up my mind last quarter that, if I could not get the articles together in better time, I would retire from the editorship of the Review. The result of my exertions is that they are later than ever. This is a great evil to the printer, but it is beyond my power to remedy, or at least I can only remedy it by inserting inferior articles, when the cure would be worse than the disease. It is not often that I can even write my own paper at the commencement of the quarter. There will always be at that time arrears of correspondence to be cleared off, visits to be paid, books to be read, and my own subject, whatever it may be, to be studied. But if I could secure my own article, I could not secure those of others. I have tried with all my might, and though I do not doubt that many editors would succeed, I cannot. To this consciousness that the evil is beyond my control, I must add that I have a growing desire to concentrate what little knowledge I possess upon a distinct work. A perpetually increasing correspondence, and the necessity to master to some extent the subjects upon which others write, for the purpose of checking their statements and revising their articles, render it impossible to do anything of my own upon a considerable scale. I must choose between the Review and the other schemes which I formerly framed. I cannot compass both. Other motives have some weight, but these are the chief. I have been prevented from taking this step earlier from my knowledge of the difficulty of finding a

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Oct. 19, 1858.

successor to me, in the present scarcity of literary men. I wish, however, you could be induced to see a little of my old fellow-collegian Prowett, for I have a strong idea that he is the very man for the post. He is a gentleman, a good scholar, and a barrister ; he is accustomed to edit, and a man who can get out a newspaper every Saturday would certainly not be behind-hand with a Q. R. ; he has a tolerable acquaintance with literature, a vein of humour, and a notion of style, which is what few possess ; lastly, he is a thorough Conservative, and is accustomed to consider political questions. He lives, moreover, in London, and has fifty advantages in which I am deficient.”<sup>1</sup>

Murray, when he got this letter, felt that perhaps he had been pressing criticisms unduly upon his editor, and immediately wrote one of his affectionate notes to dispel the impression, and repudiate all notions of a change in the management of the Review. Elwin replied, “A thousand thanks for your most kind letter. . . . I was going to have said that if the Review passed into new hands I would do everything in my power to promote its prosperity,—write regularly for it (if that was thought desirable), and advise or assist with reference to articles upon subjects which might lie out of the province of the editor. This would be a duty if it was not a pleasure. I have a deep sense of the obligations I owe you, and the friendship which the Review has been the means of producing between us would alone make the recollections connected with it delightful. It is certainly a most pleasing circumstance that we should have continued throughout on terms of the most entire confidence and the most cordial intimacy. I must beg you to dismiss from your mind all notion that you

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Dec. 7, 1858.

have unduly pressed upon me. Nothing could have been more considerate. It is I myself that feel that the delay is a real evil. After your most kind letter I am desirous to try a little longer what I can do. I have set several new contributors to work, and their labours have not yet been brought to bear. If we can succeed in finding an increased staff of competent writers, this will go far, of itself, to effect the desired remedy. Let us see what the next six months brings forth, and suspend the question till then. I will make another effort, and think I may succeed after all.”<sup>1</sup>

Murray was not at Albemarle Street when Elwin's letter arrived. Robert Cooke, his partner, forwarded it to him, endorsed in pencil, “I could not resist opening this. How good and nice it is!”

Worrying as the Review work had become, and pressed as Elwin was with his multifarious engagements, he still found time to stay occasionally with old friends, and to relish their company. He visited Lady Westmorland in November, 1858, and as he could not also spare time to go into Cumberland, Lord Brougham came down there to meet him. When Elwin returned home he wrote to his hostess, “To tell you how much I enjoyed my visit to Apethorpe is impossible. It was charming to me at the time, and it dwells with delight upon my memory.”<sup>2</sup> “I got home last night,” he wrote to Murray, “after the most delightful visit I ever spent. Brougham is ten years younger than he was ten years ago. He was wonderful. The Duke of Bedford, himself an old man, and Lady Westmorland, whose experience is also tolerably extensive, agreed that such vigour of body and mind was never before seen in a man of eighty-

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Dec., 1858.

<sup>2</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, Nov. 24, 1858.



one. Lyndhurst is very decrepit, and has been for some years, but Brougham is as fresh as a boy. He travelled from Brougham to London on Monday. On Tuesday he transacted a world of business, and attended the Guildhall dinner. On Wednesday he came to Apethorpe, where he was fuller of vivacity than I ever saw him. And on Thursday he went to York to deliver an oration to a popular assembly on the same evening. On Wednesday night he laughed at the Duke of Bedford for going to bed at twelve o'clock, and wanted to know how he could reconcile it to his conscience to pass so much time in sleep; and, after sitting up himself to I know not what hour, I found him in the library at half-past eight the next morning writing letters. He was so hilarious and excited at breakfast that he could hardly eat or drink. As you know, he will rarely say much in general companies, but he departed from his usual habit at Apethorpe, and I never, even in a private talk, heard him so agreeable and witty.

"What a thing is fame! It came out on Wednesday evening that Brougham had never heard of Ruskin, or the Duke of Bedford of Carlyle. 'A man by the name of Ruskin,' said Brougham, 'read a paper on art at the Liverpool meeting'—which paper Brougham went on to condemn. 'I have written,' he said, 'to ask who the fellow is, for I never heard of him before. Did you?' Lady Westmorland told me that she showed the Duke of Bedford Carlyle's *Life of Frederick the Great*, and that it was evident he was a total stranger to the name of the author."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Nov. 14, 1858. In a commonplace-book, Elwin records a similar instance: "I have been told that when the poet-laureateship became vacant by the death of Wordsworth, Rogers called on Sir Robert Peel, and asked him to bestow the office on Tennyson. 'I have no doubt,' replied Sir Robert, 'that you recommend the person whom you believe to be the worthiest, but I never before heard his name.'"

Through Lord Brougham Elwin had made the acquaintance of Lord Lyndhurst, who invited them both to spend a quiet evening alone with him on December 1st, 1858. Elwin enjoyed it so much that he made some memoranda of what passed :—

“I should think a more wonderful pair was never seen since the days when man’s life was limited to threescore years and ten. Lyndhurst is in his eighty-sixth year, Brougham in his eighty-first. ‘Did you ever,’ said Lord Lyndhurst to me, ‘see such a wonderful fellow as that? He is as active as a greyhound.’ But Lyndhurst himself, except being weak upon his legs, is really just as vigorous, though six years older. His spirits were as elastic, his talk as mercurial, as if he had only come of age to-day. I can convey no idea of the animation of the conversation, of its playfulness, its vigour, and its ease. Time has not chilled their affections, nor abated their vivacity, nor diminished their intellectual vigour. The talk and manner neither of one nor the other exhibited the *faintest* touch of senility. Language, memory, observation, all was as perfect as in the morning of life. The brilliancy of youth and the experience of age were met together. Both, too, have kept abreast of the time. There was nothing of the *laudator temporis acti*, nothing of the living in the past to the exclusion of the present. Each takes an eager interest in all that is passing, and each thinks that England was never so happy and prosperous as now. I was greatly struck with the cheerfulness of Lord Lyndhurst’s manner, and with his beautiful courtesy—so perfect, graceful, and natural.

“I observed to Lord Lyndhurst, ‘It is common to call this a commonplace age, which indeed is the cant of every age. But consider what you have seen in your lifetime—gas, steam-navigation, railroads, the electric tele-

graph, photography, geology (which has revealed to us a new world), to say nothing of the marvellous progress of the people, material, moral, and intellectual, or the great men who have been illustrious in letters, arms, the senate, and the bar. LORD LYNTHURST: 'I made the same remark to Lord Brougham to-day, in nearly the same words. People sometimes say that they should have liked to live in some other age. It is impossible for us to wish that. The last fifty years are the most wonderful in the history of the world.' 'There is one thing I am anxious to see effected,' he said, 'the dens of London removed, and better dwellings provided for their wretched inhabitants. I entirely go along with Lord Shaftesbury in thinking that their whole welfare depends upon it.'

"I talked to Lord Lyndhurst of education, and of the impossibility of carrying it far with people, the greater part of whose time must be spent in manual labour. In this he agreed, and thought it a detriment to them. 'What I most desire,' he said, 'is to see the girls educated, for when they become mothers they will then educate their children. Literature is out of the question. It requires a long education to get a taste for Milton and Dryden. All refined tastes are acquired slowly. But I would have them taught the elementary truths of science. These they can understand and apply to their business. They will thus learn both to reason and to observe, and will continue to attend adult classes in the evening, after they have left the day school. They will be eager to listen to statements about air and water, light and heat, where they would refuse to go and repeat their A B C.'

"Lord Lyndhurst said, 'I do not know the condition of the Bar now. In my prime it was very superior to what it had been before I started in life.' I said I was afraid it had degenerated again, and Brougham said,



‘Certainly. There are fewer scholars and men of high attainments than in his day.’ I remarked that the judges had a passion for talking and making bad jokes. This Brougham confirmed, and imputed it to the custom of reporting trials more fully than formerly; for, as anything which raised a laugh was sure to be given, the judges spoke for the press. As the bar, too, laughed with *counterfeited glee*, a dull judge got to imagine himself *a wit of the first water*. ‘Nobody,’ I said, ‘was a more frequent or a worse performer than ——.’ ‘Yes,’ said Lord Lyndhurst, ‘he always reminds me of the donkey who tried to jump into the lady’s lap because he saw the spaniel caressed as it lay there. Since real wit is relished, he is moved to produce his bad imitation.’

“I asked Lyndhurst if he ever heard Pitt speak. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘three or four times.’—‘Was it like the speaking of our day?’—‘No, quite different. It was much more artificial, but very grand and imposing of its kind. Pitt used a great deal of action, and often threw his body upon the table before which he stood. In those days the ministers always appeared in the House in full dress, and such was his vehemence that, before he had been speaking half an hour, the pomatum and powder from his hair trickled down his face.’

“‘I never,’ said Lord Lyndhurst, ‘heard Fox when he was great. His speeches, on the occasions when I chanced to be present, were very lame. What I chiefly remember is that his large protruding paunch was alternately drawn in and puffed out, and in the inward movements his waistcoat hung loose about him, as if it was twice too big for him.’

“Lord Lyndhurst said again, ‘There is much more intelligence and knowledge in the House of Commons now than there was formerly. When I first entered it

there were only three or four speakers on each side, who were a sort of professed retainers for their respective parties. Now and then a country gentleman was told that if he would express his opinion it would have great weight, but he only uttered a few sentences.'

"I asked, 'Was the speaking as animated under the old system as under the present?' LORD LYNTHURST: 'Yes, more so, I think.' This Brougham confirmed; but added that the cry which used to be raised of *Canning, Canning—Brougham, Brougham*, was no compliment to them as speakers, nor proceeded from any desire to hear them, but from the knowledge of the country gentlemen that until they had spoken they could not go home to supper or bed."

The company of judges always fascinated Whitwell Elwin. One of the dinners that he used to recall with the greatest pleasure was at Lord Lyndhurst's, on June 22nd, 1859. "We had," he wrote, "what never, perhaps, was seen before at a private party,—four Lord Chancellors (Lord Lyndhurst, Lord Brougham, Lord Cranworth, and Lord Campbell), and a fifth person (Lord Kingsdown) who had twice refused the chancellorship." Lord Campbell had just accepted the great seal, and having to attend a State concert at Buckingham Palace afterwards, came in full dress. Lord Lyndhurst had himself advised his appointment, but, Elwin wrote, he "bantered him a good deal. 'Happy man,' he said, when he wished him good night, 'I see you like your slavery.' Once, when Lyndhurst went out of office, and saw the new chancellor in his robes, he exclaimed, 'Oh, heavens! that ever I should have worn such toggerly!' He seemed to have the same sort of horror in thinking that he was ever bound by the official trammels in which Campbell delights." Lord Campbell's own description of the dinner, in his diary,

was, "We were immediately in our old, familiar, rollicking mood."<sup>1</sup>

"At dinner," said Elwin, "I found myself between Lord Broughton<sup>2</sup> and Lord Wensleydale. Upon the other side of Lord Broughton was Lord Brougham. It chanced that we talked of the Hours of Idleness, and Lord Brougham assured us that he did not write (as he is always now supposed to have done) the famous satirical article upon it in the Edinburgh Review. He read the criticism before it was published, and approved of it, but he was not the author, nor did he know who he was, though he supposed it to be Jeffrey.<sup>3</sup> Lord Broughton described the effect the article had upon Byron. 'It is all over with me,' he said, 'I am done for, for ever.' 'Nonsense,' Lord Broughton replied, 'write something else, and show these critics that you are a cleverer man than they take you for.' 'No,' said Byron, 'it is no use—there is an end of *me*.' At that time he had displayed no power, but it was in him, and it is curious to see how ignorant he was of it. It should be a lesson to all men not to be daunted or despair.

"Bellenden Ker said of Lord Brougham, after he was gone, 'There is always a foundation of truth in his statements, but he is such a terrible exaggerator.' 'No, no,' said Lyndhurst, 'I do not admit that. I consider that the worst exaggerator is the person who understates.' This is an original remark, and a just one. There are a great many timid people who convey as false impressions, and do as much mischief, by tame, inadequate expressions and descriptions, as others by their over-vehemence and hyperboles."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Lord Campbell*, vol. ii. p. 372.

<sup>2</sup> John Cam Hobhouse, Lord Byron's friend.

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey also repudiated the authorship (see Medwin's *Conversations of Lord Byron at Pisa*, p. 174).

<sup>4</sup> To Miss Holley, June 27, 1859.



## CHAPTER X.

1859-1860

QUARTERLY REVIEW WORK—THE VOLUNTEER MOVEMENT—ORATORY—RESIGNATION OF THE EDITORSHIP

UNPUNCTUALITY of publication had been a failing of the Quarterly Review in the days of Gifford. When the second number was lagging grievously behind time, the elder Murray wrote to him, on May 11th, 1809, "I begin to suspect that you are not aware of the complete misery which is occasioned to me, and the certain ruin which must attend the Review, by our unfortunate procrastination. Long before this every line of copy for the present number ought to have been in the hands of the printer. Yet the whole of the Review is yet to print. I know not what to do to facilitate your labour, for the articles which you have long had lie scattered without attention, and those which I ventured to send to the printer undergo such retarding corrections that even by this mode we do not advance. I entreat the favour of your exertion. For the last five months my most imperative concerns have yielded to this, without the hope of my anxiety or labour ceasing."<sup>1</sup> When the fourth number was over a month late, Gifford wrote to Murray, "We must, upon the publication of this number, enter into some plan for ensuring regularity."<sup>2</sup> But the fault

<sup>1</sup> Smiles's *Memoir of John Murray*, vol. i. p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> The same, p. 168.

continued, and George Ellis complained of it as the "one intelligible obstacle to the extensive success" of the Review.<sup>1</sup>

Elwin's delays were less prolonged than Gifford's, but he was as incorrigible an offender; and though the third John Murray's remonstrances were less vehement than his father's, they were equally persistent. The number for January, 1859, was late, as usual, and the publisher again suggested that the editor might "at least get forward with his own papers, so as to have more leisure to devote to those of others at the last." "You overlook," reiterated Elwin, "that the *writing* them is only a part, and an insignificant part, too, of the whole labour. I am a conscientious reviewer. I never write upon a man till I have read every word I can find about him, nor criticise a book till I have read every line of it. The works of most of our great authors are voluminous, and though I believe I have a general acquaintance with all of them, I never pronounce upon them from memory. You may imagine that it is not the business of a week or a fortnight to prepare myself, especially when I can only devote a part of the day to it. It is therefore inevitable, in the majority of instances, that the actual composition should be at the close of the quarter and not at the beginning. My habits of mind would not permit me to put pen to paper with imperfect views and partial information. I am bent upon enforcing punctuality upon the contributors, and ensuring the punctual publication of the Review, but upon other points I can hold out no hope of greater diligence than I have hitherto used. Perfect editors do not exist any more than perfect men. Every person will fail somewhere, especially when he has to deal with a variety of in-

<sup>1</sup> Smiles's *Memoir of John Murray*, p. 188.

dividuals and conflicting interests and opinions, but I have always thought, with all sincerity, that there were many who could manage the Review better than I do." Elwin imagined that Murray had intended to imply that the articles of contributors were imperfectly revised. "As you seem," he said, "to call for improvement in a department in which I conceive I have laboured to the uttermost of my ability and strength, I am obliged to state distinctly that it is altogether beyond my power to do more in it than I have hitherto done, and earnestly to request that I may be released from the task if you have the least feeling of dissatisfaction upon this head."<sup>1</sup>

Whatever momentary irritation might be caused by criticisms was always dispelled immediately by Murray's gracious replies. Three days after Elwin agreed to go up to London to join a party at Albemarle Street, to which the publisher had invited some promising writers with a view to enlisting them into the service of the Review. "I have not much hope, however," the editor wrote, "of finding new recruits. I have experienced too many disappointments to be very sanguine. I have come to learn that you may find more good anythings than good writers. There are plenty of scholars, no doubt, who can turn out grammatical composition, but it is as dull as it is grammatical. Men who have special knowledge, but little power of writing, are almost the best strings we can get to our bow, with a rare exception here and there. By all means let us continue our search. It is only by looking among the pebbles that we can find an occasional gem."<sup>2</sup>

The Quarterly Review for January, 1859, contained Elwin's second instalment of the Life of Dr. Johnson. Soon after its publication, Murray forwarded to him a

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Jan. 29, 1859.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Feb. 1, 1859.



letter from Lord Broughton, in which he said, "By the way, your last Quarterly contains more than one most masterly article. I read the Johnson only yesterday with tears of admiration. Indeed, there are some traits in the character of that good and glorious man that I can never contemplate *siccis oculis*."<sup>1</sup> The praise came as a most opportune encouragement, while the editor was feeling depressed by the difficulties attendant upon his work. He wrote to Murray, "Mrs. Elwin sometimes upbraids me for being apathetic about what I write, or what becomes of it. This arises in part from my loving literature for its own sake, without reference to any other result than the personal delight I take in it; in part, from my setting very little store by notoriety of any description; and in part, from my conviction of the insignificance of my productions. To say this comes naturally into my mind at the present moment because, when I read the letter of Lord Broughton at breakfast, she exclaimed that she was glad to find that I *could* be moved by commendation. It really gave me more pleasure than I ever received from anything of the kind before. The particular phrase which he used was of all the phrases he could have selected from the English language, the one which gratifies me the most. I, too, read portions of Johnson's character with tears in my eyes. There are traits which have this effect upon me whenever I think of them, though it is for the hundredth time. I had no idea that I had succeeded in conveying this impression in the article, and to find that it has left this feeling in the mind of a man like Lord Broughton is an immense satisfaction to me. I am charmed also by the epithets which he applies to Johnson. That so noble a specimen of humanity should

<sup>1</sup> Lord Broughton to Murray, Feb. 20, 1859.

be caricatured, as he often is, says very little either for the hearts or heads of the writers. I have said more than I ought upon a subject which is personal to myself, but the pleasure I feel carries along my pen."<sup>1</sup>

The reception given to this article on Johnson, and to that on Sir Charles Napier in the number for the preceding October, induced Murray to suggest the separate republication of some of his Quarterly Review essays, commencing with these two. "The scheme," Mrs. Elwin wrote to Murray, "has had the unusual effect of inspiring Mr. Elwin with some interest and enthusiasm. He never cares to write, and when he has written he does not care for what he has done; but for the first time he is fairly taken with the idea, and is ready to throw all his energies into the task of making them as perfect as possible."<sup>2</sup>

The editor was once more full of projects for articles, both by himself and by others. Nevertheless, he wrote very little in 1859, being hindered by his Pope work, and other miscellaneous duties. The spring and summer numbers of the Review had nothing from his pen. The autumn one only had a few pages by him in a paper written conjointly with two other divines. He had become intimate during the year with Archbishop Whately, and exchanged letters with him two or three times a week. "Though I did not want more correspondents," he wrote, "his letters contain so much that is valuable that I do not grudge adding him to my long, long list."<sup>3</sup> Whately was a great friend of Dr. Fitzgerald, then Bishop of Cork, and afterwards of Killaloe. The three combined to refute a book by Professor Powell, called "The Order of Nature," in which he attacked the authenticity of miracles. Elwin's

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Feb. 23, 1859.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Elwin to Murray, Feb. 23, 1859.

<sup>3</sup> To Miss Holley, Oct. 31, 1859.

portion of the review was the concluding section, seven pages long.<sup>1</sup> "The article," he wrote, after the number was published, "has made a stir, so we three wise men did not lay our heads together for nothing. This arises in part from the pugnacious propensities of mankind, and the delight they take in seeing the teeth of a professor knocked down his throat."<sup>2</sup>

It was no doubt this piece of work that led Dr. William Smith to ask Elwin to undertake the subject of "Miracles" for the Dictionary of the Bible, which he was then in course of editing. To criticise Powell's book was more in his line than to draw up a short encyclopædic treatise on miracles as a whole, and it was never even begun. At last the proofs of the Dictionary had to be made up, and eight pages were left for Elwin's contribution. Eventually Bishop Fitzgerald wrote the article at double the length, and an extra half-sheet had to be interpolated with a supplementary numbering of the pages.

Elwin's name had already been printed in the "List of Writers" in the first volume of the Dictionary, in anticipation of his contributing to it, but it contains nothing from his hand. All he did for it was to read through "several hundred pages" of the first volume while it was in proof, with a view to suggesting revisions, during the autumn of 1859.

He was at the same time busy upon an abridgment of the first edition of Dr. Livingstone's *Missionary Travels*, which the author had committed to him when he returned to Africa. "He is a noble fellow," wrote Whitwell Elwin, "as simple and humble as a child, and as energetic as a giant. So much enterprise, I should think, was never before combined with such calmness of demeanour and

<sup>1</sup> *Quarterly Review*, vol. cvi. pp. 447-54.

<sup>2</sup> To Miss Holley, Oct. 31, 1859.



such an entire absence of pretension. He is the model of a missionary traveller. The man is far greater than his book, for he had been too much employed in *doing* to have practised the art of *saying*. He is one of my heroes.”<sup>1</sup> The curtailing of the long original narrative was not much more than mechanical work to a critic of Elwin’s literary instincts. Nevertheless, when he sat at it for many hours in the day, he found that he was “in an incipient fever” by the end of a week. He was obliged to diminish his working time, relinquishing night penmanship, and throwing himself back instead into an armchair, where he could “read and muse quietly.”<sup>2</sup>

He was, indeed, on the verge of a nervous breakdown from overstrain. “I have been very restless this last week,” he wrote to a friend in November, 1859, “could do nothing but brood, and suffered a good deal mentally. I have had a hard struggle to get my mind calm and peaceful.” His eldest son, Fountain, an engineer, had been abroad for a long period, and was returning from Constantinople. When he reached Gravesend, being still very busy on board, he thought his parents would assume he was all right, and sent no letter to announce his arrival. They saw in the Times that his ship had anchored in the Thames on a Sunday evening, and as the week ran on without a word from him, they became greatly perturbed. “The agony in which we passed those three days,” Elwin said in a letter, “it is impossible to describe. On Friday evening, as I was sitting in misery before the fire, my eyes shut, and my head bent upon my chest, I heard him walk into the room. I knew his footstep, but yet in the intensity of my anxiety felt so sure that I was deceived, that I did not raise my head or open my eyes till he touched my shoulder. I was conscious of uttering an

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, March 12, 1860.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Oct. 31, 1859.

exclamation of delight, but none whatever that I gave a shout (as Fanny told me afterwards) which made the house shake. It shows with what energy highly wrought feelings express themselves without any effort, or even will, upon our own parts. I had no more choice in the matter than a musical instrument when a performer plays upon it." He was so happy that in the evening he said they would have a pipe together, though he had scarcely ever smoked before. "Will you, father?" replied his son; "then now I begin to have some hopes of you." He had brought "some bewitching Turkish tobacco" home with him, and the one pipe grew to four. From that time onwards Elwin became very fond of smoking as an accompaniment to his evening talks. He was now forty-three, an age at which new habits of this kind are probably not often acquired.

A few days after his son's return, Arthur à Beckett, the brother of Gilbert à Beckett, the caricaturist, came with his family to stay with Elwin. They had been schoolboys together, and always great friends. During Elwin's Cambridge vacations, having no very settled home, he spent some of his time with à Beckett in London, where he was a medical student, and having an amateur interest in medicine, visited hospital wards in his company. À Beckett, in his turn, stayed with the Elwins, became intimate with the family, and married Whitwell's eldest sister, Emma. Ultimately he went out to Australia as a physician, made an excellent practice in Sydney, saved a competence, and now, after several years' absence, had returned joyfully home to settle again in his own country. While he was at Booton he had a fancy to see his and Whitwell's old school at North Walsham, and they went over it together. "The principal recollection the scene brought back to Arthur's

mind," wrote his old schoolfellow, "was of his having bought of the servant of an apothecary, who lived on the other side of the playground hedge, sundry bottles of a filthy compound which was asserted to possess the virtue of producing whiskers. When no result ensued, the man used to say, 'You don't do it right; you had better have another bottle.' Arthur and Hastings (who was a fellow-dupe) had accordingly three bottles apiece, and for each of these bottles they paid half a crown."

Elwin was so poorly that he only partly enjoyed the visit of his brother-in-law, though he was a delightful and accomplished man. "There has been much talking of old times," Elwin wrote, when the à Becketts left, "and much jest and laughter, though it was nearly all outside merriment with me."<sup>1</sup> He thought himself that he had grown graver than of yore. He was restless, sleepless, and nervous, suffering from the strain of incessant overwork. The sequel of à Beckett's life was touching. He had invested his savings in Australian mines, which failed, and in a few years he suddenly found himself a ruined man. With a fine courage, he abandoned his cherished desire to spend the rest of his days in England, and at about fifty returned to Australia to commence life again from the beginning, built up a new practice, and died still in harness in the colony.

It was in this disturbed state of overtaxed energies that Elwin wrote his article on Cowper for the Quarterly of January, 1860. He burnt his first attempt, then started again, and tried to "strike it off at a heat." It flowed so freely from his pen that half was written in less than a week. The last half—not equal to the first—was composed more fragmentarily, amidst interruptions, and was cramped in length to prevent the subject from run-

<sup>1</sup> Letter, Dec. 12, 1859.



ning into a double number, which was never considered good for the Review. He thought so badly of the essay himself that he would have put it on the fire if his wife had not insisted that he was mistaken in his judgment of it. In the opinion of most critics, it was really one of his best biographical articles. In one respect it did not altogether represent his permanent opinions, for it was written in the height of evangelical sympathies, which he afterwards modified. Cowper's form of melancholia, and his association with the Calvinistic John Newton, brought religious topics into the article. Elwin heartily endorsed Newton's opinions, and defended the effect that his phase of piety had on the disordered mind of the poet. So emphatically did the bias towards Newton's school of thought come out in the article that it was afterwards maintained by one of his friends, who wished to see him promoted, that Church preferment had been due to him from the powers then in authority, because of the signal way in which he had served "the low church party and dissenters" in the Quarterly, notably in this paper on Cowper. Elwin's appreciation of John Newton's views had so changed when he returned to the subject in his later years that he intended entirely to recast this section of the biography, and made some notes towards its alteration in the manuscripts which he left behind him.

The January number of the Quarterly had been taken early in hand towards the end of 1859, with a view to avoiding the usual rush at the end. It was, however, again as much in arrears as ever. There was the inevitable pressure of work, the hurried revision of proofs, the tearing fortnight in town, and the ever-recurring dislike of the harassing task. "To this kind of life," he wrote soon afterwards, "I have an increasing aversion. It is true penance to me. But there is no escape from it at

intervals, until I can escape altogether from the Review. I have again tried to find a substitute, and I fear my success will be no greater than on former occasions. The burden is very heavy to me at times, not from the labour, but from my distaste of the occupation."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, he was soon meditating upon a critical essay for the April number. It was to have been on the congenial subject of Addison, but he was so taken with the autobiographical papers of his friend Leslie, which Murray had submitted to him in manuscript, that he contributed a delightful sketch of the painter instead.

Meantime Elwin had been a good deal moved by the death of Sir William Napier, on February 12th, 1860. He said that he cried "half the day like a child" on receiving a long and rather pathetic account of the general's last days from Miss Napier. "He was the most of a hero," he wrote, "of any man I ever saw. It was the perfect type of a soldier's countenance,—noble features, a beaming eye, a fine forehead, a commanding aspect. His conversation was in keeping with his face. His sentences were short, his language terse and classical, his opinions decisive. Yet with his martial aspect, his vehemence, the fierceness with which he attacked those whose notions he disapproved, his lofty independence, his inflexible self-will, he was one of the tenderest and most loving of human beings. I have often seen his eyes fill with tears, which sometimes rolled down his cheeks. His fondness for children amounted to a passion. To those whom he had once taken to his heart he never spoke an unkind or hasty word. He exactly answered to Shakespeare's description of Wolsey—

Haughty and sour to those who loved him not;  
But to those men who sought him sweet as summer.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Feb. 14, 1860.

<sup>2</sup> Henry VIII., Act IV. Sc. ii.

While my own memory remains, I shall cherish his.”<sup>1</sup> The old Peninsular generals who had served with Sir William sent Elwin a petition that he would write a notice of him for the *Quarterly Review*, similar to that which he had drawn up on Sir Charles. The editor was eager to do it, and the Napiers warmly seconded the request. It was thought that it would be an excellent prelude to the fuller biography that was to be written. There was perfect willingness to provide information for it, but naturally it proved impossible to separate the materials which might be used at once from those which must be kept for the formal *Life*, and therefore it was decided to postpone the essay until the book should be published.

Another death touched him greatly this year,—that of his brother Marsham, in July, 1860, at the early age of forty-eight. He was a man of great talents, and of a singularly lovable disposition. Whitwell Elwin intended to go to the funeral, but when the vehicle came to take him to the station, he dared not face the ordeal.

Meantime a new interest had entered into Elwin’s life, and had been assimilated with all the ardour of his enthusiastic temperament. This was the Volunteer Movement. In 1859 it was expected that the French would make an attempt upon England in the following spring. “Our people,” Elwin wrote in November, “are preparing with the calm determination which is characteristic of our nation. The panic ceased the moment we began to act, and nobody now is disturbed at the prospect.” “The great thing,” he said, “is to have as many hundreds of thousands as possible who have rifles in their houses, and some knowledge of how to use them. No enemy would then venture to invade the country. Volunteers might not be as good

<sup>1</sup> Letters, Feb. 20 and March 12, 1860.



as regular soldiers, but they would be good enough for the purpose for which they would be wanted." "A nation waiting with rifles in their hands to receive them," he said again, "is not so tempting an object to the French as a nation rich, confident, and defenceless."<sup>1</sup>

The cause was taken up slowly in Elwin's immediate neighbourhood of Norfolk. A vast deal of ignorance had to be dispelled before its nature was even properly understood. A County Court judge, who met Elwin in a train, propounded to him the view that the proper way to defend the country was to arm the people "with very long pikes, so that they could puncture the French before the French bayonets could reach the pikemen." "They might as well," said Elwin, in narrating the conversation, "be armed with wooden spoons." A greater obstacle than ignorance was the unwillingness of squires to subscribe for the establishment of the rifle corps. The raising of one in Elwin's country district was largely due to his exertions, in association with those of another clergyman, the Rev. J. M. Wilder, Rector of the adjoining parish of Brandiston. Wilder was a determined character, not endowed with gifts of oratory, but with the power of irrepressible pertinacity. He took the lead in the campaign, and left the speaking at meetings to his friend, while he did the active canvassing of the country, which he carried out with such determination that one old gentleman took down his door bell and locked his outside gate, to rid himself of Wilder's untiring visits. Thereupon Wilder got a very long stick, leant over the gate, and rapped at the door until it was opened by a servant, who persisted that her master, whose shadow he declared he saw in the hall, was not at home. His ambition was always to raise somebody's ire at a meeting, for he said nothing could

<sup>1</sup> Letters, Nov. 14, Dec. 5 and 26, 1859.

ever be done without a fray, and when a discussion began to get warm, he rubbed his hands, and exclaimed aloud, "I am delighted to see that we are likely to have a little difference at last." Elwin said that when he was making a speech Wilder halloed him on "as a huntsman halloes on the hounds."<sup>1</sup>

The combined effort of these queerly linked champions was soon rewarded by the formation of a little corps at Reepham. Elwin, Wilder, and two other rectors joined it themselves, donned a uniform, and drilled in the ranks. There did not appear anything unclerical in the occupation to Elwin's mind. On the contrary, he became a volunteer from a deliberate sense of duty. "It is," he said, "from no impulse of martial ardour—of which I have long seen the folly and the crime—that I wish to be of use if the crisis comes. It is as a stern and solemn duty, in the spirit of piety and prayer, that I should go forth. I should die with shame if I were to sit at home while others were fighting battles in which I have as deep a stake as anyone. I have to fight for wife and children, for everything that is most precious to me. I am solely moved by the sense of what religion dictates. It is in that light that I have calmly considered the question, and if I love my neighbour as myself, it is plain that I must assist in protecting those who cannot fight, and must aid those who can and will. It signifies little whether there is one more or less in the field, but it signifies much to me, and to those who love me, whether I do my duty or shirk it."<sup>2</sup>

This sentiment was his abiding conviction on the subject. He recurred to it often, and emphatically in a stirring speech which he delivered at Reepham, on May

<sup>1</sup> Letters, Dec. 26, 1859, Jan. 2, 1860.

<sup>2</sup> To Miss Holley, Nov. 21, 1859.

31st, 1860, for the purpose of rousing zeal in the movement. He prepared this address with great care, and a quotation from it will convey some conception of his impassioned strain of speaking, in the oratorical style then in vogue among masters of the art. After quoting, from Shakespeare's *Henry V.*, the king's address to the inhabitants of Honfleur, depicting the horror which would ensue if his troops were let loose upon the town, he continued :—

“Contemplate the frightful picture which has been drawn by our great dramatist, think of the rivers of blood and rivers of tears that would flow, call not merely to mind the anguish while the dreadful deeds were doing, but the sorrow of heart which would be left as a legacy to the survivors, never to be healed till the entire generation which had been the subject of the horrors had passed away, and then conceive the comfort and security if we have only an army of volunteers to march straight into the gap and hurl back the enemy. Better—far better still—if you will but come forward in sufficient numbers : no invasion will be attempted, and the only conquest we care to make—the conquest of peace—will be secured to us without firing a shot or striking a blow. The first duty of a good citizen is to learn to defend his land, his liberty, his religion, his family ; and in my view the person who declines the task is a traitor to himself, his country, his creed, his household. If, through the lukewarmness of our civilians, the French are tempted to join in a death struggle with us, every drop of our blood which is shed will be upon the heads of the inglorious, indolent, selfish people who might have averted the calamity, but would not. In that hour I shall not envy the lusty, vigorous man who is compelled to meet the gaze of wife or children, father or mother, feeble age or feeble childhood, of wrinkled



or delicate faces wet with tears and pale with terror. I shall not envy the man who is compelled to witness a spectacle like this, and say, 'I cannot help you: the arm which has the strength to defend you wants the skill, and there is not a terrified maiden among you but is as good a soldier as I.' Wives, mothers, sisters will look to husbands, sons, and brothers to protect them, and shall they look in vain? Terrible indeed to the defaulters will be the shame of that time, and the finer spirits will rush to an almost useless death to avoid the dishonour of a disgraceful life. How different will be the feelings of the Volunteer! I venture to affirm, in the behalf of my comrades, that the hour of danger will be the hour of our pride. With what exulting sensations shall we march from our homes to the scene of action! With what ardour shall we be animated when we behold a nation depending on our exertions! Every wet cheek and pallid face, every glimpse we catch of past peace and present alarm, will rouse our spirits and promote our courage, for we shall think within ourselves, 'It is we who must be to you shield and spear; it is we who must stay the calamities you dread; it is we who must preserve you from brutality, from bloodshed, from wholesale pillage and wholesale murder.' I say again that we shall be proud of our trust, proud that we have learned our duty, proud that when thousands turn to us with imploring eyes we can answer them with the look of self-assured protectors who are pledges for their safety."

It is difficult to estimate such a style of speaking in these days, when, perhaps for lack of orators, it has gone out of fashion. To modern ears it might sound artificial. But it was an art of great beauty, in which high excellence was rare. Elwin was a born orator, and he had it in perfection. He used very little action, but his clear,

stentorian tones, his rich, classic language, and emphatic elocution, with his expressive features confirming the heartfelt reality of the sentiments, was thrilling in the extreme, and held an audience spellbound. Whether they were ignorant or educated persons, they were alike carried away by its irresistible power. When he sat down on such an occasion as the above, the cheering would be not merely vociferous. It was that peculiar, long-rolling applause that finds a difficulty in spending itself, when an assembly is lifted out of its own self-control.

Public speaking, Elwin said, was the occupation in the world that he hated most. This was not from a sense of inability, but from shyness. Genius for speaking has never been a specific against nervousness. On the contrary, the best speakers appear to have suffered from it the most. Lord Lyndhurst once told Elwin that he never rose to make a speech without feeling his legs tremble under him. To a temperament like Elwin's the sensation was too great a strain to be willingly incurred, and the occasions on which he exercised his highest oratorical talents were rare, and the circumstances usually obscure. He would readily give unpremeditated addresses, when occasion offered, full of information, humour, and interest, on any subject that might call for his remarks. But they were of a totally different character from the set speeches which formed his conception of oratory. These he would prepare with much deliberation, and would often pace up and down the room or the garden, in company with his wife, rehearsing them aloud, till the details were mastered to his satisfaction. He did not leave any point unconsidered. "You know," Lord Brougham once wrote to him, "the importance I attach to small matters in oratory, and that I feel an interest in that, as it is

my *trade*.”<sup>1</sup> Elwin felt the same necessity, although it was not his trade in the sense in which it was Lord Brougham’s.

His hearers had usually no conception of the process by which the result was obtained. They imagined that this stream of lofty declamation flowed at will from his lips. They wondered sometimes why he would not respond to a sudden call for a speech at some meeting where perhaps he felt that ordinary sentences would be inadequate. The standard of his great orations was far too high to be produced on the spur of the moment. “There is a vulgar and very erroneous notion,” he wrote in a commonplace-book, “that genius is a species of inspiration, in which excellence is the spontaneous product of the undertaking. Whenever we see great effects, there we see the result of great toil, either past or present.” He was fond of illustrating this by referring to the industry with which men like Johnson, Burke, Garrick, Newton, Reynolds, and others eminent in their several callings, had qualified themselves for their professions. Lord Brougham, with whose habits he was familiar, used often to begin the preparation of some of his formal addresses months beforehand. Elwin wrote an article on Public Speaking for the Review, in April, 1858, and its chief burden was the enormous amount of pains by which the greatest orators had qualified themselves for their task.

While Elwin’s volunteering was commenced as a solemn responsibility, the movement had its lighter side, and afforded him a good deal of healthful exercise, and a certain measure of that mirthful entertainment which his humorous mind was ever ready to note. The very incapacity of the raw recruits was diverting. In describing their first drill at Reepham, Elwin said in a letter,

<sup>1</sup> Lord Brougham to Elwin, 1857.



"Our place of exercise was the bowling-green, and we attempted to walk across it (a distance certainly of not more than twenty yards) in military step. We were two deep, and when we halted some of the rear rank men were in advance of the front rank, and others of the front rank had fallen behind; to our right and left we had lost our distance as much as in front and rear; and, in short, we were scattered about in such wonderful confusion as made it a marvel how the disorder could have been produced by the mere effort to move in order. The sergeant moralised upon our situation. He bid us look at the result to which we had attained. His sermon concluded, we faced about, and marched back across the bowling-green. This time the rear rank all got into the spaces between the front rank men, and instead of reaching the hedge in two lines, as we started, we made one wavy line. Luckily we had no spectators. Nor were we even allowed to laugh at our own mistakes. The sergeant told us that neither laughing nor talking were permitted in the ranks, and that it was very unmilitary. Some began to drill in their great coats, but were glad before the conclusion to be in their shirt-sleeves, from which you may perceive that it is exceeding good exercise."<sup>1</sup>

Elwin's volunteering zeal was not evanescent. He long continued an active member of the corps as a private in the ranks, put two of his sons into it as soon as they were old enough to bear arms, and to the end kept his interest in all the fuller developments of the force.

In the summer of 1860 Elwin's editorship of the *Quarterly Review* suddenly terminated. He was in the middle of the customary pressure at the end of a quarter, when he received one morning the following letter from Murray:—

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Jan. 16, 1860.

50, Albemarle Street,

*June 26th, 1860.*

MY DEAR ELWIN,—Your resignation of the editorship of the Quarterly, so often reiterated, your urgent requests to me to look out for a successor, and the evidently increasing difficulty which you feel in carrying on the laborious correspondence inseparable from the office, have compelled me to look out for some person to succeed in the event of your retirement, which I have long felt to be inevitable. If therefore you continue in this mind, I can now offer to relieve you of the duties, as I have ascertained that my old friend, Mr. Wm. Macpherson, formerly of Trinity College, Cambridge, and more recently filling a judicial office in India, is willing at least to make the trial. As yet I have taken no further step than to sound him, confidentially, on the subject, and I shall not proceed further until I hear from you; but I am much mistaken if you have not carried on the late numbers of the Review chiefly as a favour to me, and that you pine for a freedom which would enable you to pursue your literary tastes without the incumbrances of editorial responsibility. I hope I need not assure you how deeply sensible I am of all your kindness, as well as of your high qualities of mind and heart, which would render the thought of any severance from you unendurable. That I can find any successor to you, in the proper sense of the word, I consider scarcely possible. I should never have thought of suggesting a removal, and write this believing that in what I am doing I am only carrying out your own wishes to remain a permanent contributor to the Q. R. rather than be entangled in the difficulties of the management. It would not be consistent with the friendship which has so long subsisted between us that any doubt should remain on this point. I rely upon your approved candour and friendship to correct me, if even you have changed your own mind on the subject. I know that you are very busy at this time; consider, therefore, and answer this, at your leisure. Meanwhile, with the highest esteem,

I remain, my dear Elwin,

Yours sincerely,

JOHN MURRAY.

The letter, like all Murray's acts, was kindness itself; but it came at a moment when Elwin was not in one of his recurring humours for resignation, and its immediate effect was disturbing. The final decision was postponed until his visit to London in July, but he recognised at once that he ought to take advantage of the opening to withdraw from a post which had become too burdensome for his health. Nevertheless the last step was not easily accomplished. Murray himself was greatly distressed at the prospect of his retirement, and begged him to go on if he could. Lord Brougham took the news acutely to heart, and went to Lady Westmorland to urge her to use her influence with him to make him go on with the work. "I have a hard battle to fight," Elwin wrote, on July 7th, when the matter was still hanging in suspense, "and while it remains doubtful feel much like a criminal, tried for murder, while the jury are deliberating upon their verdict. But I stand staunch to my determination. My previous convictions are strengthened by reflection. I feel, indeed, as if it were impossible for me to carry the burden any longer. It is not the work I mind, for I intend to work harder than ever, but I object to being dragged so much into the world, and am weary of the incessant conflict I have to keep up in order to avoid being dragged in much further. I have already twenty times too many friends or acquaintances, and the number goes on perpetually increasing. The correspondence this involves is frightful, and much of it is a sad waste of existence."

The resignation was finally pressed, and accepted, two days later, on July 9th. Under a sense of relief Elwin sat down immediately, and wrote: "I feel like a man who had been transported for seven years, and whose time is up, except that I suppose a convict is ashamed to look his friends in the face, whereas I shall be more than ever



delighted to see mine. It has been a tough business, but to my own astonishment I stood firm, and triumphed. Everybody tells me that I have done very wrong. But it does not move me, for I know I have done very right. As for the £1,400 a year, I do not bestow a thought upon it. If we can but live, I value all the money beyond no more than so much dirt." Yet he had a double feeling about the matter, and Forster noted that he was looking terribly ill and concerned. He could not be otherwise than moved at the severance of associations which had largely influenced his career, and brought him the best friendships of his life. At Albemarle Street also there were mixed feelings at the cessation of his rule. Whatever minor complications had arisen from Elwin's deficiency in business-like routine, there was genuine distress at the loss of his literary talents, and at the breaking of a tie which had first formed his affectionate link with the Murrays. Yet, regrettable as the termination of Elwin's editorship was in many respects, it had become inevitable. Both he and the Review might have suffered if the strain had been continued much longer.

"The circumstances attending his retirement," writes Mr. John Murray, "were curiously similar to those in which Gifford gave up the editorship,—the same persistent unpunctuality, the same want of business habits, on the part of the editors; on the part of the publishers, the same personal affection and admiration for their colleagues, and the same half-concealed irritation caused by irregularity on the one hand, and the remonstrances of readers and purchasers on the other. The number of points of similarity between these two men, as editors, is most striking. In their profound knowledge of English literature; in the high standard which they set up as their aim; in their independence of political partizanship; in

their unwearying correction and re-writing of the work of other contributors; in their disregard of society, but attachment to personal friends; in their very dilatoriness, and power of work under pressure—they were almost the counterpart of each other.” Whatever his failures were, Elwin, like Gifford, had been a great editor. He had taken up the *Review* when it had lost ground through Lockhart’s disabling illness, and he had set it on as high a pedestal as it had ever occupied. To have accomplished this was no small triumph for one who began the work as a young literary man, without any name or previous reputation to help him.

To Elwin’s friends, who were accustomed only to see him in the full flow of his high spirits and sparkling conversation, his resignation was unintelligible. They were surprised and distressed. In literary circles the regret was also very great, and prolonged. Lord Brougham spoke of it as still fresh a couple of years after.<sup>1</sup> No one, at the time, wrote him a kinder letter than Thackeray, who, a few months before, when sending him the inaugural circular of the *Cornhill Magazine*, had playfully endorsed it with a few gay lines of banter, concluding—

Sir, my brother, I address you as the Editor, and am,  
de votre Majesté Trimestrielle,

le bon Frère,

CORNUCOPIUS I.

On learning of his retirement, he wrote, July 28th, 1860:—

MY DEAR PRIMROSE,—What is this that I read in the *I. L. N.*<sup>2</sup> about your laying down the sceptre? I have been away in the distant solitudes of Tunbridge Wells, and only come to town for a day, when I read this dismal announcement.

<sup>1</sup> Lord Brougham to Elwin, Dec. 31, 1862.

<sup>2</sup> *Illustrated London News*.

Whether you are a King or a country Primrose, my dear Elwin, you must please remember that I am affectionately\* yours,

W. M. THACKERAY.

\* This is rather a strong term, you see, nor do I use it on many occasions, but in this I can't help myself, and when I likes a man I likes him.

Elwin's last number of the Quarterly contained a sharp criticism of Gladstone, who had finally severed his links with Conservatism, and had joined Lord Palmerston's administration as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Lord Brougham wrote to the editor, while his resignation was still unconfirmed, "I have been much distressed at reading the attack on Gladstone in the Quarterly Review. It is exactly following up the constant attacks on him of the Times, and this makes it the more offensive, for these attacks are plainly a plan of 'writing him down,' and though of course you can have no such design, yet I suspect your contributor has, and therefore I do expect you to let Gladstone know that the article is not yours, to which you may fairly add that it was inserted when you were about to retire from the editorship." The request would certainly not have been complied with, for Elwin never shirked responsibility for what he admitted into the Review. It was curious that, after Gladstone had been his main hope for the revival of the Conservative party, during most of his conduct of the Quarterly, the last stroke which had the warrant of his editorial hands should have been an emphatic repudiation of Gladstone's political views.

When Elwin resigned Murray generously offered him £400 a year if he would contribute an article to each number of the Review. He had always intended to continue writing for it, whenever he got free from its



management, but when the change had actually taken place, his mind did not easily fall into the humour for doing so. It was only after an interval, and then not often, that he again wrote articles.

The editorship, as it was Elwin's chief public work, so it was his most brilliant. He never wrote afterwards at the same strain, and therefore never quite rivalled his literary achievements of that period.

## CHAPTER XI

1860-1863

VISITS AND REMINISCENCES—LORD BROUGHAM'S  
SPEECHES—PREPARATION OF POPE'S WORKS.

WHITWELL ELWIN retired from the editorship of the Quarterly Review when he was still in the prime of life—only forty-four years old. He anticipated two results from the change: first, that now he was freed from the obligations incident to managing a journal, he would be able to abandon social distractions; and secondly, that in the retirement of the country he would at last be able to write his *Lives of the Poets*. Neither expectation was realised. The society which had fretted him when he was an editor now fretted him no more, for the irritation had really come chiefly from the harassing combination of multitudinous engagements. Consequently, as soon as his visits to London ceased to be compulsory, he renewed them voluntarily, and, after a time, withdrew the objections that he had formerly been wont to urge against going into society. Thus he wrote in 1864: "I have undoubtedly changed and modified many opinions. As I grow older I believe I grow less narrow-minded. I attach much more importance to the essential qualities of love, goodness, etc., than to the mere garnish of life, and do not imagine that every company is evil where a few people are assembled for social satisfaction. There is a frivolity which is debasing, but there

is also an interchange of mind and thoughts and feelings which is elevating."<sup>1</sup>

Having no need to secure for himself a comparative retreat for Review work, he now usually stayed with intimate friends, instead of going to an hotel, and this made London very much pleasanter to him. On the whole, however, the life was no quieter than before, nor was the intercourse more restricted to a congenial few. "Every visit to London," he wrote in 1864, "is more and more distracting. Acquaintances multiply indefinitely, and I have literally not one instant to myself from eight o'clock in the morning till two o'clock at night. Even then I cannot get through half I undertake."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, having no proof-sheets to worry him, he did not mind the scramble. "I have enjoyed myself," he said in the same letter, "as much as is possible to be done in the midst of endless hurry."

He kept up most of his old friendships, and added new ones. His affection for Thackeray was unabated, and so was Thackeray's for him. Soon after the novelist had published the Roundabout Paper on "Thorns in a Cushion," in which he detailed his sufferings as editor of the Cornhill, Elwin had occasion to send him a letter, and wrote "No thorn" across the seal. Thackeray replied to him in the next Roundabout: "A grandson of the late Rev. Dr. Primrose (of Wakefield, Vicar) wrote me a little note from his country living this morning, and the kind fellow had the precaution to write 'No thorn' upon the envelope, so that ere I broke the seal, my mind might be relieved of any anxiety lest the letter should contain one of those lurking stabs which are so painful to the present gentle writer. Your epigraph,

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, March 23, 1864.

<sup>2</sup> The same, June 10, 1864.



my dear P., shows your kind and artless nature, but don't you see it is of no use? People who are bent on assassinating you in the manner mentioned will write 'No thorn' upon their envelopes too, and you open the case, and presently out flies a poisoned stiletto, which springs into a man's bosom and makes the wretch howl with anguish."<sup>1</sup>

"Won't you come to London," Thackeray wrote, May 24th, 1861, "and see the new house I am building?—such a good, comfortable, cheerful one, all built out of Cornhill money." Accordingly Elwin lunched with him when he was in town in June, and went to look at the house. As they were going over it, Thackeray said, "An uncle of mine annoyed me by saying, 'It ought to be called *Vanity Fair*.'" "Why should that annoy you?" asked Elwin. "Because it is true," replied the other; "the fact is, it is too good for me."

Elwin, on the same occasion, praised the *Adventures of Philip*, which was then coming out in the Cornhill. Thackeray knew wherein its weakness lay. He said, "I have told my tale in the novel department. I can repeat old things in a pleasant way, but I have nothing fresh to say. I get sick of my task when I am ill, and think, Good heavens! what is all this stuff about?" Miss Thackeray asked him at lunch whether he was going to dine at home or "at a house by a river." "At a house by a river, to be sure," he answered; "I shall go to Greenwich and write a bit of Philip." "Write Philip at a tavern at Greenwich!" exclaimed Elwin. "Yes," he replied, "I cannot write comfortably in my own room. I do most of my composition at hotels or at a club. There is an excitement in public places which sets my brain working."

<sup>1</sup> "On Screens in Dining-rooms," *Cornhill Magazine*, Aug. 1860.

Miss Thackeray brought out some pen-and-ink sketches which her father had been making for a charity bazaar. Elwin asked if she would sell him one by private contract. "No," interposed Thackeray, "you cannot afford to buy gimcracks, now you are a dethroned editor. I will draw something for you, and give it to you."<sup>1</sup> A few days after he sent him a little note, written on the official Cornhill Magazine paper, with a humorous sketch at its head.

Thackeray wrote, "See what a wholesome corrector was in store for me in that heap of letters which you saw." The "corrector" enclosed was a note, written in an uncultured hand, from some unknown critic, who said, "It is with great regret I write the following letter,—regret that cause should have arisen for the writing of it. I will not trespass much on your valuable time, and will at once come to the subject. That subject is the great degeneration in your writings since you published your last great work, the *Newcomes*. The *Virginians* was a great falling off, but even that was immensely superior to the portion which has appeared of the *Adventures of Philip*. Surely, as an admirer of your genius, I have a right to appeal to you (even at an immense pecuniary sacrifice) to consult your future fame, and to keep it intact by writing no more novels, if you cannot improve on *Lovel the Widower*. Perhaps this letter is written to no purpose. Maybe, blinded by the flattering incense offered by the world to a great man and a successful one like you, you will set me down as a presumptuous fool. Anyhow, I have done what I consider my duty in writing and telling you the truth, even at the risk of irretrievably offending you. It is written in the best wish both for your future fame

<sup>1</sup> Elwin to his wife, June 13, 1861.



My dear Dr. Prunrose

Least I should be too much elated by your praises  
 the other day see what a wholesome corrective was in  
 store for me in that heap of letters w<sup>h</sup> you saw

Yours in pretty good spirit nevertheless

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and happiness." The writer added a P.S., "I send my address, and hoping you will not lug my humble epistle into a Roundabout Paper."

The friendship continued to the end. "My dear Primrose," Thackeray wrote, after he got into his Palace Gate house, "I should like to see your old countenance again. We have a snug little bachelor room, remember, when you are minded to try it."<sup>1</sup> But they did not meet again. Thackeray died in the following December. When Elwin read the news in the paper he was quite struck down with grief.

It was at Forster's that Elwin chiefly met Dickens. He occasionally also went to his house; once to some private theatricals; and, again, he and Forster spent a night together at Gadshill, in June, 1859, when Forster recorded that they played billiards in the evening, and "Elwin lost." This was not wonderful, for if he had ever played billiards at all before, it could only have been when he was a lad. Elwin probably did not rank Dickens quite high enough as a novelist, for caricature was never much to his taste, and he thought Dickens's books were spoilt by it. But personally and socially, he was fond of him.

In October, 1861, Dickens was on a reading tour in the Eastern counties, and visited Norwich. Elwin called on him at his hotel, and Dickens mentioned in one of his letters that he was the only friend he had yet come across in his tour. "Fancy this," he wrote to his sister-in-law, Miss Hogarth, "last night at about six, who should walk in but Elwin! He was exactly in his usual state, only more demonstrative than ever, and had been driven in by some neighbours who were coming to the reading. I had tea up for him, and he went down at seven with me to the dismal den where I dressed, and sat by the fire while I

<sup>1</sup> Thackeray to Elwin, March 9, 1863.

dressed, and was childishly happy in that great privilege! During the reading he sat on a corner of the platform, and roared incessantly. He had brought in a lady and gentleman to introduce while I was undressing, and went away in a perfect and absolute rapture." The reading was a very successful one. "A splendid hall last night," Dickens wrote, "and I think *Nickleby* tops all the readings. It went last night not only with roars, but with a general hilarity and pleasure that I have never seen surpassed."<sup>1</sup>

Elwin recorded his own account of the occasion in a commonplace-book: "I went on Tuesday, October 29th, to hear Dickens read at Norwich the description of Squeers's School from *Nicholas Nickleby*, and the Trial from *Pickwick*. He hits the exact medium between dramatic reading and acting. He personates the characters, as regards pronunciation and voice, but abstains almost entirely from gesticulation and action. His variety of impersonation is very great. He has a distinct intonation for every character, and the mimicry—whether of men, women, or children—is nearly always natural. It is both animated and refined, very telling and yet never exaggerated. Anything more perfect of its kind could not be imagined. He is equally excellent in both the pathetic and humorous parts. He read the scenes from *David Copperfield* on Monday for the first time in public, and the description of the school which he read on Tuesday was for the first time also. He told me he had practised them every day for two hours during the last three months. This is an evidence of the labour which is necessary to excellence. He has an extraordinary natural aptitude for reading: he has had long experience in it, and he reads his own works, where he must be

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Charles Dickens*, by his sister-in-law and eldest daughter, vol. ii. p. 151.



entirely master of the intention. Yet when he tries a fresh piece it requires three months' training for two hours a day! He said he could not get up his lesson with less study, and that every reading suggested some fresh point. I remarked that 'great excellence always implied great application, and that there was no such thing as a genius which worked spontaneously. Carlyle says truly that every immortal work is written with the blood of its author.' He replied that he had never done anything himself which was worth doing, without a strain, and bending all his faculties to the task.

"Fanny Kemble's reading of Shakespeare was mentioned. I said it was hateful, because it was coarse and masculine; that the first quality in a woman was to be feminine, and that without this charm there was no charm in any gift of mind or person she might possess. Dickens acquiesced with marked emphasis. He said, 'The people who write books on the rights of women beg the question. They assume that if women usurped the functions of men it would be a clear gain,—so much added to their present merits. It never occurs to them that it would be destructive of what they have,—a total overthrow of everything in them which is winning and lovable. A male female is repulsive.' To which it may be added that their mimicry of qualities which Providence has denied them is in general only a bad imitation, so that, in throwing off womanly grace, they do not attain to manly attributes.

"Dickens began life as a reporter. He said that Brougham in his prime was by far the greatest speaker he ever heard. Nobody rivalled him in sarcasm, in invective, and in spirit-stirring eloquence. He was the man too, he said, who of all others seemed, when he was speaking, to see the longest way before him. Dickens

thought some speeches which Lyndhurst made when he was chancellor were models of grace and dignity.

"I have always found Dickens charming in conversation. He is natural, cheerful, full of knowledge, very easy in his talk, with a gentle touch of humour, and a keen appreciation of it. He is extremely hearty and social, and altogether as excellent a companion as I have ever met."

Another literary celebrity, whose acquaintance Elwin had made in 1859, also through John Forster, was Carlyle. They dined together at Forster's, on March 17th, 1862, and spent an argumentative evening. Elwin was then engaged on Pope, and the conversation turned on the subject of his mendacity about his works. While Elwin was emphatic in denouncing the poet, Carlyle took up the cudgels in his defence. Narrating the circumstance two days later, Elwin wrote in a letter to a friend, "Carlyle was in high spirits. He talks in very energetic language, adorned with strong, homely images, but he never knows when to stop, and his opinions are almost all paradoxes. His favourite theme is railing at the world, especially at the present age. A topic which is only second to it is the supremacy of genius, and the contemptibleness of all people who are not geniuses. As he held such sentiments, I was of course in fierce conflict with him every minute. He went so far as to maintain that, as the greater part of the world were fools, men of talent were excusable in being rogues. It was a kind of necessity, he said, from the miserable materials with which they had to deal. But we cooled down over a pipe." John Forster was on Carlyle's side. "Poor Elwin," he said, "could make little way. I never heard Carlyle so eloquent."

Carlyle's "paradoxes" and "energetic language" were some barrier with Elwin to any enthusiastic admiration of his literary genius. He used to criticise his coined

words and uncouth sentences, and sometimes laughed at his magisterial airs, which he would mimic in relating his conversation. But he recognised his ability, and appreciated him personally; visited him at Chelsea, and enjoyed several evenings with him at Forster's, where they were the only two persons who were allowed to smoke,—"Elwin eagerly talking, and showing his evident liking for Carlyle," as their host was pleased to note.

Another literary friend whom Elwin owed to Forster, and whose personality he also preferred to his works, was the poet Browning. He sometimes tried to read his compositions, but never succeeded in making much progress in the task. "Elwin was very good on Browning," wrote John Forster, after a conversation at dinner, in 1872;—"a genuine poet who mixes eccentricity largely with his verse; then, as time moves on, he loses the poetry and retains only the eccentricity." A lady, who often stayed at Booton, was a great admirer of Browning. Elwin once told him how much she delighted in his poetry, "which," he added, "she thoroughly understood." "Then," said Browning, "I should very much like to know her, for she would be exceedingly useful to the author."

Browning had a handsome thoroughbred Arabian pony, which had been twice blessed by the Pope at the annual ceremony at Rome on St. Anthony's Day. It had belonged to his wife, who died in 1861, and he had then brought it to England for his son. When the boy outgrew it, his father, who was very fond of the animal from its associations, wanted to find it a home, but it was too spirited for anyone to be willing to take it. Meeting Elwin at dinner, in June, 1863, at Forster's, he offered it to him. With characteristic temerity he accepted the gift. No horse had ever been kept at Booton Rectory, so none of his sons had ever learnt to ride, and



this was a pony which boys who could ride were unable to manage. He took it down to Booton the next day, riding it from Norwich himself, and appearing upon it unannounced. It was always rather an anxiety, though his son Philip became horseman enough to ride it well. It died suddenly a year or two after of heart disease.

Elwin clung tenaciously to old friendships, and these it was which chiefly enticed him, from time to time, to London. "After an interval," he once wrote to Lady Westmorland, "I crave a scrap of personal intercourse—not to keep alive my affection, but to satisfy it."<sup>1</sup> He was still, therefore, frequently her guest, and he often also stayed at Albemarle Street or Wimbledon, with the Murrays, between whom and himself the old affectionate relations remained as keen as ever. His kind friends continued to esteem him so much that they still wished to draw him out of his rural retreat into what they considered would be a more important sphere of work, where he might live more constantly amongst them. In 1861 he so far yielded to their persistent solicitations as to agree that he might possibly accept a canonry if it were offered to him. Lord Brougham then applied to Lord Palmerston on his behalf, and John Forster urged the matter on Lord Shaftesbury, but no post that would suit was vacant at the time, nor would he really have accepted one if the proposal had taken definite shape.

While Elwin was maintaining his old associations with a deepening love for them, he was also assimilating fresh ones. The comparative leisure, gained by freedom from the trammels of editorship, now enabled him to pay increased visits to country-houses, where the life was more enjoyable than the hurried round of parties in London. "Why people invite me," he said, "I cannot imagine. I

<sup>1</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, May 30, 1868.

always seem to myself a dull, uninteresting person—at least in society, where what little I may have good in my mind is rarely producible.”<sup>1</sup> To those who met him his popularity was not an enigma. The high order of his conversation, both grave and gay, made him an acquisition in any company. In 1860 he went to Longleat to examine some of the Pope manuscripts belonging to the Marquis of Bath. In order that there might be nothing to hinder his work, he was asked when there were no other visitors. Lord Bath, to whom he had hitherto been a stranger, at once caught the charm of his companionship. “Thanks to your society,” he wrote afterwards, “the few days were as pleasantly passed as any I recollect.”<sup>2</sup> He immediately invited him again, when he had a party. Some of the guests on this occasion in turn asked him to their own houses, and became permanent friends. It was the same wherever he went. Therefore the circle continually grew in the country as it had done in London. He might, if he had pleased, almost literally have taken what he jestingly called a “tour through the seats of England.”

He found a good deal of pleasure in the life of a country-house, both indoors and out. He was not a sportsman, but he would often go out with the guns. Though not much of a horseman, he occasionally accepted a mount in order to ride with a fellow-guest. He was generally willing to take part in an expedition, especially if there was a gallery of great pictures in the neighbourhood. For a few days he liked the change from his own simple fare, and he had a palate for good wine, though he drank none at all at home. What he really enjoyed, however, was congenial company and interesting conversation. He especially relished the time in the

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Jan. 10, 1861.

<sup>2</sup> The Marquis of Bath to Elwin, Nov. 19, 1860.

smoking-room at night, when men unbent, and the talk flowed freely and spontaneously. "As for your sons," he wrote to his hostess after one of his visits, "you must go down into the smoking-room if you wish to have them in perfection, or at least you will find them more in their glory there than in the dining or drawing-room." Elwin himself was at his best in the same surroundings, and poured out the choicest wealth of his own remarkable talk. He occasionally rebuked himself for the very excess of the unselfish attraction that these delightful little gatherings had for him. "I am no better than a schoolboy when I am light-hearted," he once wrote to a friend, after he had been staying from home, "and I think it must be this exuberant boyishness which constitutes the peculiarity that you all allege against me. I never do behave as I ought, and am always ashamed of myself when I look back upon a visit." But, however bright he was, the enjoyment was of the highest order. Anything that was irreverent, coarse, vulgar, or even silly, instantly repelled him. "I observe," he said, "that many persons are ambitious to be the buffoons of a company—a character which no one respects. It is strange that men should labour to make themselves contemptible, and stranger that they should not discover that there is nothing more tiresome than eternal attempts to be facetious. Nothing pleases permanently except simplicity, sense, and kindness." He exemplified all three himself. "People," he said, "are so wonderfully kind, and there are so many admirable and enjoyable qualities in the world, that a man must be of a much more iron temper than I can boast not to give loose to the natural ebullitions of his mind. There is no pleasure to be compared to the pleasure of liking, and you can go nowhere but you find somebody who has likeable traits. Every-



thing depends upon whether you take people on their good side or their bad.”<sup>1</sup> The impression he left upon his hosts and companions was testified by their eagerness to receive him. “You never come here,” Lord Bath wrote to him, “but you elevate my mind.”<sup>2</sup> It was unusual, indeed, if a visit did not produce some occasion for substantial aid of a serious kind to somebody who was in a difficulty. Becoming the confidant of almost all whom he met, and being ready to devote his time and thought to anyone’s special need, his accidental meetings with friends and strangers were the constant opportunity for conferring lasting benefits.

Whitwell Elwin always carried his innate simplicity of habits with him wherever he went. He never assumed any false pretensions, and if he stayed in a great house he went as a country clergyman, unembarrassed by the paraphernalia of richer men. A tiny hand-portmanteau and small carpet-bag was all the luggage he took, and these he insisted on carrying himself. He had a nervous dread of losing them, which made him resolute always to have them in the railway carriage with him. Even when the Duke of Cambridge, after they had been staying together at Longleat, invited him into his saloon, he made no exception, and dragged his baggage in too. Its small amount sometimes provoked amused comment among those who were used to the luggage of wealthy people. Lord Bath once unlocked a musty cupboard, that they might investigate some boxes of manuscripts. As he opened the door, and saw that they were covered with dust, he turned to Elwin and said laughingly, “You had better let me go first, for I have another coat to put on, and you know you haven’t.”

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Dec. 31, 1860 and March 27, 1861.

<sup>2</sup> Nov. 19, 1860.

In these country-house visits among talented persons Elwin amassed a fund of anecdote and reminiscence, which made a delightful theme of talk when he was in the mood to relate them. The most exciting adventure he ever had was once at Apethorpe. He was sleeping on a small and low French bedstead, and was roused by the distinct sensation of a gentle heave. Thinking it must be his imagination, he dozed off again, but presently was unmistakably lifted off the floor. He thought some burglars must have concealed themselves under the bed, and jumped out to investigate, expecting to be rushed upon and attacked. As no one appeared he looked underneath, and there saw a huge Newfoundland dog, belonging to the housekeeper, comfortably curled up to sleep. In turning himself round the enormous creature had hoisted the bed on his back, as he was too high to stand under it upright.

It was difficult to visit without being visited in return, and Elwin wrote, in 1861, "I find that my visitings are likely to produce an influx of visitors. It is to be hoped that some of them will not be as good as their word, or I might as well be a Master of the Ceremonies at Bath or Cheltenham." He was always ready, in the warmth of his momentary feelings, to tell people they would be welcome, though he uniformly added that his house was a simple country parsonage, and that he never made the slightest difference when guests came to stay. As a matter of fact, it was impossible to receive people who had a retinue without turning everything topsy-turvey, and sometimes making amusing contrivances for accommodating them.

Now and then interesting persons, who came without attendants, spent a day or two at Booton, with no upset to the rectory, bringing pleasure by their intelligence and sociality. Thus, when Professor Owen went to Nor-

wich to deliver a couple of lectures in May, 1861, he stayed with Elwin, delighting everyone by his curious information and sprightly anecdotes. Elwin related his impressions of him in a letter. He said, "I went to Norwich on Tuesday to hear Owen's lecture, and a very masterly lecture it was. The subject was the Extinct Mammalia of South America, which he showed had their parallels in the living animals of the same part of the globe, but were distinct from all the animals, whether fossil or living, in the old world. But the most interesting portion of the lecture was that in which he explained how, from a bit of skull or some other small remains, he was enabled to determine to what kind of animal the fragment belonged. Nothing could be more ingenious, nothing more conclusive. He is a very simple and lucid expounder of science, and his lectures, in manner and phraseology, are not at all raised above his conversation. Their power is in their matter, and in the distinctness with which this matter is unfolded. No eloquence can charm like the works of the Creator, when a master unveils facts and relations which lie beyond the sphere of common experience, and which it requires genius to detect. The beauty of the arrangement concurs with admiration at the ingenuity of the discovery, to give a peculiar kind of pleasure, which with me amounts to enthusiasm."

After the lecture, they drove out to Booton, arriving there at eleven; sat up till two in the morning, Owen telling ghost stories of his own experience; were up again at six to go to Holkham, where they breakfasted with the Rev. Alexander Napier, the editor of Barrow's Works and Boswell's Johnson; and then visited the Earl of Leicester. "If Owen had been a demigod," said Elwin, "the Leicesters could not have shown him more homage. Even Lord



Leicester listened to his conversation in the drawing-room, instead of reading the newspaper. Thus the visit passed off admirably, and they and the Professor were equally pleased." On the following day, after sight-seeing in Norwich, Owen gave a second lecture, and it was not wonderful that "this was not so good as the former. He was tired with the adventures of the day, and the languor of body and mind was distinctly visible. Though inferior by comparison, the lecture was yet excellent in itself."<sup>1</sup>

Elwin during this period threw himself so genially into the varied sides of life that he twice acted in some small private theatricals, once at home and once in a friend's house. How emphatically he flung his energies into this, as into all he undertook, is indicated by an expression in a letter to his wife, written at the end of a rehearsal. "When it commenced, I could not help acting my part, but *I believe my voice was none the worse.*" The plays were acted in small rooms, but his voice was calculated to fill a theatre.

Another instance of his versatile capacity for enjoying the lighter as well as the graver aspects of life, may be given from an account which he wrote to a friend of his experiences in his first volunteer camp, in 1863, when the military discipline of the force was less rigid than it became after the movement was firmly established. The camp was held in Gunton Park, the seat of Lord Suffield, who was lieutenant-colonel of the battalion. Lord Suffield kindly offered Elwin a bed in his house, but he preferred sharing the quarters of his comrades. "Three parts of the pleasure," he said, "is in the novelty of the life, and it would have been very humdrum to have had to go tamely to bed in a snug, solitary room. We have lanterns in our tents, but all lights are put out

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley; May 13 and 14, 1861.

at eleven ; and then we again sallied forth and roamed about till two. Cam Wodehouse brought a bedstead, mattress, and all his home comforts, and erected himself what he called a quiet little place at the back of the refreshment booth. Our amusement was to catch hold of any stray volunteer that was lounging about, and send to Cam every half-hour to inquire if he was comfortable. He was at last wrought to such a pitch of passion that he jumped out of bed, and ran scouring over the park in his night-shirt. What he expected to effect by this manœuvre I do not know. He pricked his feet, I believe, with some thistles, and then returned to bed. At a little past two we disturbed him for the last time, and turned in ourselves. It is useless to attempt to tell all the comical scenes that occurred. I half killed myself with laughing. The captain who commanded the picquet was very ostentatious and despotic in his rounds, and the men cracked endless jests upon him. At five o'clock we were up. The washing is not a very complete process. There are only a few tin basins, and you have to carry your basin, when you can get one, a quarter of a mile to fill it at a cattle pond. The water is a sort of tawny colour, tinged with green, but it leaves no stains. I hung up a bit of looking-glass on a tree, and shaved. A shower came on in the midst of the operation, and I got a slight wetting. . . . I enjoy the life immensely."

Elwin's numerous friendships kept his correspondence almost as large, after the Quarterly was given up, as it had been when he was editor. "Letters come as thick as hail," he wrote, in 1861, "and I must abandon the task of answering them in despair." They were perhaps more interesting to him than the business letters of the Review had been, and he therefore tried to keep better pace

with them, but the work of replying had a tendency to become increasingly exacting ; for with greater leisure he got to write at greater length, and with more elaborate premeditation, than in former days. There was unlimited scope for this, since most people wrote because they wanted some information or advice, literary or spiritual, which afforded the opportunity for essays in reply, when he was minded to give them all they wanted. The time immediately succeeding his editorship was a kind of transition period, when the careful composition of his letters was only in its commencement, but even in its early stage it added fully as much to the exertion of his correspondence as the liberty from an editorial chair had lightened it.

Among those who wrote often, and consulted him much, Lord Brougham still held a chief place. He greatly trusted his judgment upon the subject of oratory, had taken his advice as to the selection of his speeches for publication, and sometimes submitted the written drafts of his addresses to him for revision and criticism. Murray, without suspecting this beforehand, once detected Elwin's hand in a speech of Lord Brougham's. Elwin was surprised at the recognition of the "few touches" that he had contributed, but his style was so pronounced that there was no mistaking his phrases wherever they occurred. Lord Brougham had long been accustomed to seek his friend's help in the matter of illustrative quotations with which to adorn his orations. Every year, especially as the time came round for his great annual address at the Social Science Congress, he now still applied to him for these. At last Elwin found it so difficult to keep up the supply from recognised poets that he took to constructing some himself. A few of these "Quotations composed for Lord Brougham" have survived. For the Congress at



Dublin, in 1861, the speaker wanted something on Intemperance and on the Mischief done by Satire. Elwin wrote both himself. His verses on drunkenness ran thus:—

The curse of every age and every clime,  
 Drink leads to want, and want conducts to crime :  
 The blight of every boon which nature gave,  
 Drink finds a free-man, and it makes a slave,  
 Quenches the lingering spark of self-control,  
 And fires the latent passions of the soul.

On the other subject he tried one or two versions, of which he sent the shortest and tersest :—

Satire is safe to find a willing ear,  
 And those who blame the hearer love the sneer ;  
 But righteous tributes no emotion raise,  
 And those who love the virtues hate the praise.

He did not reveal the authorship till after they had been used. "Many thanks for the lines," Lord Brougham wrote, when he heard they were original, "now I know to whom I owe them."<sup>1</sup>

The next year he wanted a quotation on the American War, which was then at its height,—“the greatest crime,” he said, “any people ever committed in any age,—wholesale slaughter, criminal fraud, brutal slander, and disgusting vanity. Such are the crimes of the mob, and the mob governs on both sides. Whosoever cannot resist the mob is a criminal, though his crime lies in his weakness.”<sup>2</sup> The required verses did not readily suggest themselves ; time ran on, and Lord Brougham was in despair. “Do, I beseech you,” he wrote, “give me a helping hand in quotations.”<sup>3</sup> Thus pressed, Elwin again had recourse to his own inventive powers, and composed some for him,

<sup>1</sup> Lord Brougham to Elwin, Sept. 4, 1861.

<sup>2</sup> The same, April 24, 1862.

<sup>3</sup> The same, May 14, 1862.

in the antithetical style which characterised nearly all his poetry :—

The boasted conquest which thy passion yields,  
Are ruined houses, desolated fields ;  
The laurels to thy frenzied pride so dear  
Drip with the soldier's blood, the widow's tear,  
And all the trophies of thy fancied fame  
Are but thy guilt, thy torment, and thy shame.

Lord Brougham wrote, after he had used the "quotation," to ask the name of the poet. On hearing it, he replied, "I had no idea to whom we were indebted for the excellent lines. I assure you they were received with great applause."<sup>1</sup>

The last was perhaps the most poetical of Elwin's attempts in rhyme. Yet it lacks the ring of genuine poetry. These fragments only confirm the conclusion, suggested by his early efforts, that he was not by nature a poet.

Lord Brougham's vitality, which had made him young at eighty, was now beginning to give way, and he soon after retired from public life. "Dear Lord Brougham," wrote Elwin, in 1868, on hearing of his death, "was already dead to his friends. Happily the recollection of him remains, and his memory should certainly be precious to us, when we must all acknowledge that even his greatness was surpassed by his kindness. His warmth, tenderness, and constancy of friendship were wonderful. I owed him much."<sup>2</sup>

On the literary side of Elwin's life, he was still impeded from undertaking any substantial work of his own by the ever-growing magnitude of the task of editing Pope. The periodical influx of new letters, and the new threads of inquiry which had to be pursued, continually threw back

<sup>1</sup> Lord Brougham to Elwin, Sept. 5, 1862.

<sup>2</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, May 14, 1868.

the prospects of bringing it to any degree of completion. Elwin also was too exhaustive a worker to proceed quickly, except under compulsion. Murray began to be provoked by the delay, and would have recalled all the papers in 1861 had not John Forster successfully interposed and inculcated patience.

At the end of 1862, after Elwin had been five years on the work, the first volume of *Letters* was in print. A masterly Introduction of one hundred and thirty-one pages exposed Pope's malpractices with merciless lucidity. The skill with which his deceptions had been tracked was shown by the fact that the few points, which rested on conjecture in this Introduction, were entirely corroborated, after the volume was printed off, by the discovery of some unprinted letters between Pope and Lord Orrery. Dilke was delighted with the Introduction, but doubted whether the public would stand so terrible an exposure of the poet's character. Others who read it thought, with Carlyle, that genius should be some protection from too rigid an inquiry into moral deficiencies. Elwin had defended himself, in anticipation, from this kind of objection. He said, in the Introduction: "The scrutiny to which the lives of celebrated men are subjected is one of the severest penalties they pay for fame. Their private weaknesses have often been exposed with wanton cruelty; but the delinquencies of Pope are public acts by which he himself has challenged inquiry. He endeavoured to pass off a sophisticated correspondence for genuine, and the interests of truth demand that the deception should be exposed. He laboured to throw his own misdoings upon innocent men, and justice requires that his victims should be absolved, and the discredit, augmented beyond measure by the perfidy and deceit, be laid where it is due. He was the bitter satirist of individuals out of an assumed



indignation at everything base, and his claim to adopt this lofty strain, his sincerity in it, and his fairness, are all involved in his personal dealings. The office of an editor is neither that of an advocate nor of an accuser. He is a judge, whose only client is truth. I have endeavoured to investigate the facts with impartiality, and narrate them with fidelity, and if I have anywhere failed, it is from unconscious, not from wilful error ; but having once been satisfied of the guilt of Pope, I do not pretend to think that genius is an extenuation of rascality." He summed up his own sentiments in a "quotation," composed for the purpose :—

Who for this end would earn a lasting name,  
Join moral infamy to mental fame,  
Would tear aside the friendly veil of night  
To stand degraded in a blaze of light."<sup>1</sup>

The first volume, though printed off, was kept back till there should be a prospect of more to follow it. Neither he nor his publisher even then contemplated how many years would still elapse before these would be ready.

<sup>1</sup> Pope's *Works*, vol. i. pp. cxli., cxliii.

## CHAPTER XII

1863-1871

ARTICLES FOR THE QUARTERLY REVIEW—EDITING OF POPE'S WORKS—HOME INCIDENTS—DEATH OF ELDEST SON—LAST OFFERS OF PROMOTION—FIRST VOLUMES OF POPE'S WORKS.

ELWIN thought, when he had unravelled the tangled skein of evidences as to Pope's correspondence, that he had broken the neck of his work. After a rest, he applied himself to the annotation of the letters. "I now sternly refuse all invitations," he wrote to Murray, November 25th, 1862, "and am driving the plough with all the speed I can command. I am resolved that we will have several volumes out this year." He was, however, frequently suffering from dyspepsia, which troubled him periodically for the remainder of his days, and the task dragged on heavily. "As for Pope," he wrote, early in 1863, "the work is endless, and the road lengthens the further I go. I must get you to begin to publish soon, for I shall never finish unless I have the printer at my heels."<sup>1</sup> Still he held out hopes that the publication might begin at the end of 1863, and be continued by a volume every two months after.<sup>2</sup> As the time drew near, Murray wrote to ask when the successive volumes might be expected.

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Feb. 19, 1863.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Aug. 14, 1863.

Elwin replied, "I have a difficulty in giving you a satisfactory answer, for I find by experience that it is impossible to tell beforehand how much time each portion may require. The execution is always much slower than the imagination represents it. That it has not gone on quicker is owing to the extent of the undertaking, and not to any want of interest, industry, or zeal. I enjoy the kind of work, and always go to it with eagerness, and leave it, even for a day or two, with regret. I will have the volumes ready as quickly as they can be done, consistently with doing them completely, and any delay which is caused by increased care will be to the advantage of the work in the end."<sup>1</sup> Murray had to be satisfied with this indefinite prospect, and the publishing season again passed away without any instalment of Pope.

The editor had, indeed, only been working at it spasmodically since he had completed the first volume. It was laid by so long at a time that once some mice ate up a considerable portion of neglected manuscript. Some of his energies in 1863 had been devoted in snatches to revising his essays on Dr. Johnson, as he was "eager to push on" their preparation for separate publication.<sup>2</sup> At the commencement of 1864 he turned aside again to write the first article for the Quarterly Review that he had contributed since his resignation. The subject was the Life of his old friend Sir William Napier, as a notice of the recently published biography. At first the paper flowed freely, but in the end did not prove very tractable. Sir William's career had few romantic incidents, except in its Peninsular period, where it coincided so nearly with that of his brother that the main features had already been told in the essays on Sir Charles. Elwin then tried

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Nov. 6, 1863.

<sup>2</sup> Letters, Feb. to April, 1863.



to make the general's character his central theme, giving a subordinate place to his deeds, but this scheme failed for want of sufficient illustrative facts. Finally he resorted, for the basis of his narrative, to the Peninsular campaigns in which Sir William had been engaged, using his History for materials, and this proved as excessive a source as the printed biography was defective. Hence, when the limits of an article were reached, he had made very little way in the story of his hero. He therefore offered, if it was thought best, to withhold what he had done, and incorporate it into the joint Lives of the two brothers, which he was still intending to write hereafter. The fragment was, however, published in the Quarterly for April, 1864, but was followed by no sequel. Neither in its matter nor its style could it compare with its brilliant precursors on Sir Charles Napier, and consequently it attracted less interest from the public and less enthusiasm from the family.

Meantime, Murray, who was uneasy as to Elwin's adverse tone towards Pope, had been gathering opinions upon the caustic Introduction to the poet's correspondence. The result was that Dean Milman undertook to write to the editor and represent to him "that the demolition of Pope's character would in a great degree destroy the interest in his works," and that therefore it would be for the advantage of the edition if the poetry were allowed to lead the way, and the letters, with their condemnatory commentary, were kept in reserve. "I am not myself of that opinion," Elwin wrote to Murray. "The world have long known him to be a very tricky little fellow, and have gone on reading his works notwithstanding. They will now know him to be rather worse than they supposed, and, as I believe, will still value his poetry according to its intrinsic excellence, and not according to the character

of the man. I further think that, as the novelty of our edition is in the letters, and not in the verse, the correspondence will, in the first instance, though not permanently, attract much more attention to the book than the poetry. These are my personal ideas, and always have been. But there is no man in England whose judgment on such matters is more likely to be sound than that of the Dean, and I should not for an instant dream of setting up my opinion against his. As he would not have written, I presume, without your concurrence, I infer that you agree with him, and under these circumstances I have not the slightest hesitation in assenting to the change of plan, and bringing out the poetry before the letters."<sup>1</sup>

The alteration, like most afterthoughts in a publication that has been partly printed, caused some awkwardness in the structure of the edition. The first volume of prose, which had already been printed off and frequently referred to as "volume i," now became volume vi., and this necessitated the numbering of prose and poetry in separate sections, with a second general numbering of the complete series. Ultimately, too, the Introduction was found to be too introductory to the whole work to be relegated to the middle of it, and was moved back to the first volume. As this now consisted of poetry, and the Introduction dealt almost exclusively with the correspondence, it was here out of its place, and apparently nullified the whole purpose of the change, by blasting Pope's character at the outset.

The editor, however, soon took to the new plan, for he found it a relief. "The poetry," he said, "is like a holiday after the letters."<sup>2</sup> He even wrote, "I delight in the pursuit. It just suits me, for it is employment without

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, March 30, 1864.

<sup>2</sup> The same, April 19, 1864.

exertion.”<sup>1</sup> Cheered by the variety, he was “sanguine that he could have four volumes—two of poetry and two of prose”—ready for the autumn of 1864. “I have acted throughout,” he wrote to Murray, “on Goethe’s motto, ‘Without haste, yet without rest.’ This system, though it has tried your patience, will begin now to bear its fruit.”<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless the fruit still hung long before it could be gathered. After a period of vigorous plodding at it he became ill from overwork, and stopped altogether for a time. Punch once included Elwin’s Pope with Landseer’s long-delayed lions for the Nelson monument in Trafalgar Square, in an ironical list of things that might be expected some day, and on another occasion sarcastically asked, “How is Mr. Elwin?”

Weary of Pope, but finding pleasure in the use of his pen, Elwin recurred to the Quarterly Review. Many years before a Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds had been planned and begun by Leslie, the painter, who left it unfinished. When he was dying, in 1859, he wrote to Elwin expressing a wish that he would complete it for him. He also left a memorandum, which Mrs. Leslie afterwards showed him, in which he stated his reason for asking him to undertake this service. “I once,” he wrote, “had a remarkable conversation with him on the subject of Sir Joshua Reynolds’s pictures, and he was almost the only person I ever met who thoroughly understood them.” The work was therefore a legacy which had many attractions for Elwin. He had, as Leslie’s remark implies, an immense knowledge and appreciation of the pictures of great masters, and he considered that Reynolds stood at the head of English portrait painters. He admired his character and personality, and, moreover, he was one of the Johnsonian circle,

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, April 24, 1864.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, April, 1864.



in which his own chief literary interests centred. Forster, for some reason, persuaded Elwin to have nothing to do with the project,—perhaps only because his hands were then already more than full with the *Quarterly Review* and with Pope. He kept his decision in abeyance, however, for a year, and finally declined to perform the task simultaneously with giving up the *Review*. It was then passed over to Mr. Tom Taylor, who brought out the *Biography* in 1865. Elwin at once seized upon it as the topic for an article. He promised it for July, 1865, but, as usual, the paper took longer than he expected, and while it hung on his hands it expanded until it had to be divided into two, and when he had thus gained increased space it was still further amplified. Such processes of prolonged revision were always fatal to his best composition. Excellent as the Reynolds is, it does not equal the terse essays which were written under greater pressure. It appeared in the *Quarterly Reviews* of April and July, 1866.

The same April number contained an adverse little review by him of Professor Seeley's *Ecce Homo*, a book which was exciting much controversy at the time, when modern speculations on the Incarnation of our Lord were still in their infancy. The notice was written at Murray's special request, and the publisher had it interleaved for amplification as a separate work, but its subject lay rather outside Elwin's line, and he did not care to pursue it.

These articles gave a fillip to his essay-writing tastes. He had long promised James Fergusson to review his *History of Architecture*. He did this for the October number in 1866, though not altogether with ease, for he abandoned two schemes for his paper before he hit on the final one. He now became eager to continue this kind of literary occupation, and even suggested to Murray that if the editor of the *Quarterly* ever wanted a respite he would

gladly take his place for a time. "I shall only," he said, "find it an amusement to do his work for him. Things which are a toil for a continuance are a recreation for a period."<sup>1</sup> This contingency never happened, nor was the project for more articles realised. A recently published *Life of Whately* made him think, in 1866, that he would like to review it, because he had known and admired the Archbishop. But he found the *Biography* too meagre for the purpose.<sup>2</sup>

He collected books for a paper on Domestic Architecture, but not enough to satisfy his comprehensive taste, and he abandoned it till he could complete his information.<sup>3</sup> Being poorly in January, 1867, he amused himself by reading some volumes of French Memoirs. This gave him the idea of writing upon the Court of France under Louis XIII. "It may not seem very interesting," he said, "but the facts are stranger than a fairy tale, and the anecdotes and incidents not at all known to the majority of English people. It would make that sort of light and exciting reading which people like in a Review, and would be instructive into the bargain."<sup>4</sup> His son, Hastings Philip, was reading for the Moral Science Tripos at Cambridge between 1866 and 1868. This inveigled Elwin into metaphysics, which wholly absorbed him for a long while. He drew Lord Bath into the study, corresponded with both him and his own son on it, and wrote out elaborate analyses of some of the books set for the Cambridge examination. He even suggested a paper on Moral Philosophy for the Review, "though," he added, "I suppose the subject is not popular enough for an article, as it only suits grave people like myself."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Sept. 10, 1866.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Oct. 18, 1866.

<sup>3</sup> The same, Oct. 19, 1866, and Jan. 30, 1867.

<sup>4</sup> The same, Jan. 30, 1867.

<sup>5</sup> The same, Jan. 31, 1867.

It did not suit even him permanently, for he came at last to the conclusion that metaphysics lead to very small practical results. About two years later, in 1869, he had a fancy to write upon De Foe, but his disposition had become too exhaustive for an essayist, and he was again foiled for want of some publications that were out of print.<sup>1</sup> One or two of the proffered articles were begun; none were ever finished.

All these subsidiary studies and suggestions meant, of course, that, while they were on his mind, Pope was at a standstill. Then at length, when periodically he again buckled to, and tried to go on with Pope, it had lain aside too long for him to be able to pick up the thread where he had left it. On recurring, in 1868, to the first volume of the poems, which was then in print, he "was dissatisfied with the plan, and did it all over again."<sup>2</sup> His passion for completeness had been growing, and having begun by ruthlessly cutting down the notes of his predecessors to a minimum, he now went on to amplify his own to excess. Moreover, the dislike he had taken to Pope, instead of curtailing his annotations, only served to increase them, for he felt the need for merciless dissection as well as luminous explanation. The introductions to the several pieces also kept growing in design and dimension. "I have had two objects in them," he wrote to Murray; "one, to dispose of the controversial matter which relates to each of the poems, that I may be rid of the encumbrance in the Life; the other to teach young students the *reasons* why the poems are good or bad; for I observe in reading reviews, and in my conversation with lovers of poetry, that there are few things less understood than the *principles* of criticism."<sup>3</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, May 11, 1869.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Nov. 4, 1868.

<sup>3</sup> The same.



plan made every introduction a complete essay in itself, often out of proportion to the poem, however excellent it might be in substance. It was with some consternation that Murray saw the editorial contributions continually increasing in scale. There seemed to be a danger that Pope's text would become submerged and lost in Elwin's introductions and notes. Nor was it easy to conceive when an edition on such an elaborate plan was likely to be completed.

The effort to make progress with Pope, and the subsidiary literary work of his occasional articles, coupled with his dyspeptic attacks, and a growing application to home interests, somewhat limited Elwin's social visiting. It limited also his correspondence, and his old intimates began to rebuke him for having forgotten them. This was not the case. "I have been sitting over my books," he wrote in answer to Lady Westmorland's remonstrances, in 1863, "trying to push on my work, but incessantly interrupted by the affairs of my neighbours, who come to me in their difficulties. I doubt if I have had one single day to myself. However, life cannot be better employed than in helping on the lives of others, and I never regret the time spent in these little offices; but in doing one thing, I neglect another."<sup>1</sup> "I am a very culpable person," he wrote to her again, when she made a similar complaint in 1867, "for I am always in disgrace with everybody. Yet I love my friends with an affection which, though it is natural, and to me inevitable, often makes my children jest good-naturedly at its vehemence. I am sure that time only increases, and absence never abates it. But I am aware that I am given to brood over it in selfish musings, and that

<sup>1</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, Aug. 11, 1863.

nobody believes much in feelings which are not sometimes expressed."<sup>1</sup>

Into his simple, homely, parochial life at Booton he gives a glimpse in another letter, written to Lady Westmorland, in 1868: "Our life passes in the same tranquil round. The most stirring incident which has happened for a long while is a schism among the parish children. I enticed those who live within easy reach of my house to bring their work, in the evenings of the winter and spring, and sit round the fire while I read to them Robinson Crusoe, the Arabian Nights, collections of Fairy Tales, and a host of books of the same abstruse kind. In order to sweeten the knowledge, I had a bag of sugar-plums in the midst of the half-circle, to which the children helped themselves as they pleased, and these sugar-plums, I believe, did all the mischief; for the children who lived at a distance, and whom I did not wish to bring through dark lanes on a winter's night, grew so jealous of that part of the parish who were fed on sweetmeats that they cut them. From not speaking, the factions got to fighting whenever they met. Wounds were inflicted and blood shed (the combatants were all girls), and I have had the greatest difficulty in restoring peace. I do not know even now that I have restored goodwill. The little obscure world of a rustic village is a type of the big world. These envious, pugnacious brats are charming children notwithstanding, and have something winning even in their naughtiness."<sup>2</sup>

His outside interests were, however, as eager and versatile as ever whenever he was drawn away from home. Twice, at close intervals, in 1867 and 1868, he was enticed into attending an instrumental concert, a

<sup>1</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, Sept. 19, 1867.

<sup>2</sup> The same, May 20, 1868.

thing he probably had scarce done since his boyhood. He did not much care for solos or songs, or any of the lighter classes of music, but to hear a fine piece, played by a good band, was an immense treat to him. He knew, too, what he liked in the great composers, and was able exactly to define his own critical opinions on their work. Thus, after hearing the Pastoral Symphony and other selections from Beethoven, at Covent Garden Theatre, on September 9th, 1867, he wrote: "The storm excepted (which happily did not last long), the piece is one unceasing flow of gentle and delicious melody. It was such music as you might imagine to have been made by the spheres, if that old fable had been true—so ethereal, so peaceful, so surpassingly sweet, and so divine. Yet Beethoven is no exception to the general rule that the greatest men have only one strain. In all the pieces of his which were played you recognised the same characteristics—the same style, and turn of thought. He repeats no one else (as men do who are not geniuses), but he repeats himself. His music is just as strongly marked as that of Mozart, and though nothing can exceed the sweetness of the strain, it has, to my thinking, less depth than Mozart, less variety, less richness, less wonderful combinations of changing, unexpected turns of melody. Melody, marvellous melody, is characteristic of both, and in sweetness Beethoven might perhaps carry the day, but in wealth of ideas, and even in depth of sentiment, Mozart still seems to me the first of composers."<sup>1</sup>

The other concert was in Norwich, on April 13th, 1868, when the chief pieces were Mozart's Jupiter Symphony and Beethoven's Symphony in D. He wrote of these: "Both were beautiful, and the first transcendent. In

<sup>1</sup> To his wife, Sept. 10, 1867.



sweetness of melody Beethoven beats everybody, but in *depth* of sentiment I still think that Mozart is much his superior. There were also some songs—poor things in themselves, and poorly sung. Nevertheless the audience applauded them loudly, and hardly took any notice of the two glorious symphonies. Such is the depravity of taste. There is an *andante* movement in Mozart's Jupiter Symphony, in which portions of the music hardly seem to come from the instruments at all, but appear self-generated, and to be floating spontaneously through the air. The effect was magical.”<sup>1</sup>

It was with equal pleasure that he listened to Mozart's Requiem performed by the Bach Choir, sixteen years later. He said he had longed to hear it for some forty years. It did not disappoint him. “The Benedictus,” he wrote, “I thought the gem of the whole, though the Mass is magnificent from beginning to end. It gives you the feeling that the music of the angels could hardly go beyond it.”<sup>2</sup>

The happiness which, on the whole, predominated in this period of Elwin's life, was broken by some interludes of bad spirits and inevitable anxieties. He was often poorly himself; his wife had a severe attack of acute rheumatism; and the whole family was down in 1866 with gastric fever. The youngest boy was dangerously ill, and for a long time after in such a weak state as to cause anxiety. His aged mother also had some grave illnesses. She was a most vivacious old lady, and after paying her a visit in 1863, when she was eighty-two, Elwin wrote to Lady Westmorland, “She is nearly as active and cheerful as when she was a girl, and beat me last night at a game of croquet. I never, I think, saw such a green old age, for I cannot perceive that her mind,

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, April 17, 1868.

<sup>2</sup> The same, May 15, 1884.

her memory, her spirits, or her temper have in any degree failed.”<sup>1</sup> After one of her serious attacks, he went in 1866 to see how she was faring, and found her immediately restored to her old elastic spirits. “It seems,” he wrote, “she is eighty-five in September, but she is as erect, as active, and as lively as ever. She played croquet yesterday evening with the dexterity and the enthusiasm of a girl. She has bought an unbroken horse for £30. The animal was put into a cart yesterday, when it kicked and was very restive. She wants me to take a drive with her. I decline. She answers, ‘I am impatient to see the animal go.’ I reply, ‘You will see him go with a vengeance.’ She laughs at my scruples, and declares she has driven all her life, and has never been thrown out yet. I tell her that I, on the contrary, have been thrown out a score of times at least, and have lost my relish for it, which she considers a ridiculous weakness in me. However, I have no intention of being bullied or beguiled into yielding, though I look with wonder, and with some sort of admiration, at all this spirit and rashness at eighty-five. If I live to be eighty-five, nobody, I fancy, will ever catch me out of my bed or my armchair.”<sup>2</sup>

The most untoward event of these years was an accident to his little daughter, in 1867, when she was ten years old. She was riding on a donkey in the garden, and was thrown onto a heap of stones, and then dragged along a gravel path by her foot which had got entangled in the bridle. Her forehead was terribly gashed, and she was brought in, as the father wrote to Murray, “such a frightful spectacle” that it was with difficulty he could bring himself to write of it. Happily, beyond the scars

<sup>1</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, Aug. 11, 1863.

<sup>2</sup> To Miss Holley, July 18, 1866.

that remained, no permanent injury was done, but it was a shock to the parents, and unnerved Elwin so much that he found it difficult to apply himself to literary work for some months afterwards.

Whitwell Elwin was very fond of his children. In the busy days of the *Quarterly Review* he had been too much occupied to be their companion, but in some ways they were more interwoven into the life of the home than is usual even in the most affectionate households. Their admirable mother had not only nursed them entirely herself, but as they grew up had educated them, the father spasmodically attempting to supplement her teaching by fragmentary lessons in classics. He had such unbounded faith in her power of training, and so little confidence in public schools, that none of them were ever sent away from home till they grew into manhood. They had therefore become peculiarly the associates of the parents, who felt it acutely when one after another had to break the tie of a continuous home residence. A worse trial was in store for them. In the middle of 1869 they had five children alive; by the end of 1874 they had but two.

The first to be summoned away was the eldest son, Fountain, who had married and was settled in London, where he died of consumption, August 20th, 1869. "For months," Elwin wrote, the same day, "the apprehensions of this event have preyed upon my mind, and often when I had a smiling face my heart was aching. I thought his death would crush me, and that I should never be inwardly cheerful again. But my prayers have been more than heard, and instead of groaning I am rejoicing. I would not exchange the memories of last night for the wealth of the universe. Even when I held him dead in my arms I shed no tears, except those of gratitude and



thanksgiving. To-day we shed many, but they have no bitterness in them. He has left, God be praised, a light upon my path which will cheer me to the end of my days." "Your father's distress is agony," the mother wrote simultaneously to one of the sons; "at times he is quite calm; then follows a frenzy of grief." This double phase of a changing emotion was very characteristic of him. Intensely absorbed in whatever was the predominating feeling of the moment, he would, on tragic occasions, sometimes appear strangely cheerful; at others his grief might almost have been taken for despair by one who did not know him. However, the highest aspect was the one that prevailed. "I have lived in terror of the hour when death was to make a gap in our circle," he wrote to Murray, on August 30th, when he had returned home, "and now we have seen death, we have seen resurrection along with it, and the terror seems gone for ever."

Another death, which touched him nearly, was that of his brother Hastings's wife, a few months after. "When we buried our beloved boy," Elwin wrote, "I thought, not of his mortality, but of his immortality. I praise God who permits me to stand by this second grave with the same exalted joy."<sup>1</sup> Still the melancholy of natural grief would have its way, and he almost entirely withdrew from social company, though at times he acknowledged that he found it a relief. "The talk," he said, "takes my thoughts off from the sorrow which never leaves me when we are alone."<sup>2</sup> But he was greatly annoyed when someone asked him out, as if to a mere family meal, deliberately concealing the fact that it was a party. "Such tricks," he said, "are very wrong. It comes from the notion people have that they know better what is good

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Oct. 11, 1869.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Nov. 12, 1869.

for you than you know yourself. So they are kind to you by stratagem, and put you to a deal of pain, instead of giving pleasure."

His depression made his London friends more than ever eager to get him away from the solitude of Booton. In 1870 Forster and Murray took up the project, Lord Brougham having died in the interval. They obtained a letter from Bishop Pelham, of Norwich, recommending him for preferment, and through Lord Shaftesbury they approached Mr. Gladstone, who was then Prime Minister. The first post which became open was the Rectory of Middleton, in Lancashire, worth £1,200 a year, vacated by the appointment of Dr. Durnford to the see of Chichester. Gladstone expressed his perfect readiness to bestow this on Whitwell Elwin, if his friends thought it would be suitable for him, and, if not, he promised to keep him in mind for whatever might be more acceptable. Murray and Forster agreed that Middleton would not do, and that a canonry, by preference at St. Paul's Cathedral, was what would be most appropriate. In June, 1870, he was actually persuaded to go up to London to confer with Forster on the subject, and he then agreed to leave himself in his friends' hands. The result was that in September Gladstone made him the offer of another living. Elwin promptly declined it. "I have lived among my people here," he wrote to Murray, "till I am deeply attached to them, and could not consent to part with them to get an extra £200 a year—at least so long as I can keep my head above water, which we have managed capitally to do hitherto. A thousand thanks to you, and my dear friends, for their zeal. In the meanwhile the sun does not shine upon a more contented man than myself, nor one that has had a larger share of the best blessings of life. There are

some trials which cast a shadow to the end, but they too are blessings, and I can see their wisdom, and am thankful.”<sup>1</sup>

Finally, in December, 1870, Elwin wrote again to Murray, to entreat him to desist from further efforts. “I begin,” he said, “with myself. I had no suspicion of what was doing till it was done, or I believe I should have begged you all not to move; but when Forster told me the history, and pressed me with his usual urgency, I felt deeply the kindness, and had not the ungracious courage to thwart so much generosity. Nevertheless I had an inward consciousness that it was best for me to be left as I am. The interruptions of life are endless, and any change robs you of more leisure than it provides. Even in this little neighbourhood I have more in my hands than I can properly grasp, and some things in consequence fall to the ground. I shall still struggle hard now to finish Pope, and am certain that my best chance of succeeding is not to embark in any new course. And you must remember that there is not a happier or more contented family in England. We live the life that suits us, and have as many comforts as we desire. Therefore, as respects myself, there is far more reason to keep me down than to lift me up. Next, as regards Gladstone. He has acted with great liberality, and it seems not fair to him to refuse this thing and the other, and continue to press him for something else. The claims on him must be immense, and it may be quite out of his power to do what he is asked. Requests which he cannot grant, and does not like to refuse, are most embarrassing, and it goes against the grain with me that he should be teased any more. If, in the natural course, my turn comes round (which I do not expect, for there is not much that would

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Dec. 3, 1870.



fit me), I shall be far better pleased than by any present promotion." The last clause was probably intended to disarm controversy by appearing not to scout the idea altogether. Anyhow his mind became fixed, when he had an attack of poorliness shortly after, and he wrote to his old friend, Miss Holley, "You will not see me canon of any place. When I got ill I felt how absurd it was in me to dream of contracting fresh duties, and I wrote to withdraw my former statements, and have been easier in my mind ever since. It weighed on me like a nightmare. God willing, I will never, in an earthly sense, be anything more than I am."<sup>1</sup>

No serious attempts to move him were made again. He believed that peace was to be found only in retirement, and that he would find nothing but turmoil and trouble in a more public life. There were perhaps two sides to the question, and he may have seen only one. It may be thought that his great abilities would have been more productive in a larger sphere, and that offers of promotion might be a call to self-sacrifice at the cost of the domestic comfort which he prized. He was modest, however, about his own attainments, and always maintained that as there were plenty of competent persons eager to take the posts, there lay no obligation on him to stir from his own simpler round of duties. The principles on which he acted he applied to others as much as to himself. He was unwearied in persuading most people not to accept the burden of high places. Perhaps the ambition of the world made him feel it necessary to throw his weight into the opposite scale. At any rate, he invariably dwelt on the counter-inducements of the superior health and happiness afforded by a quiet life. "What you say," he wrote to a friend, in 1859, "of Brunel and

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Feb. 12, 1871.

Stephenson having killed themselves by tasking their energies too far, reminds me that, when I was in London, I called with Murray on Mrs. Leslie, the widow of the artist. She told us that when her husband was confined to his bed he kept repeating continually, 'I am dying from overwork.' There is a world of pathos in these simple words."<sup>1</sup> "You will see by the papers," he wrote, in 1881, "that Street, the architect, at the age of 57, had a fatal attack of paralysis while conversing with a friend. With him the disorder was the consequence of overwork. Conspicuous men, rather than retire to the rear, or ever so little from the front, strain their energies till they suddenly snap. To me this is a melancholy spectacle, and widely different from the ripe old age, which, in the natural course, stops at its appointed goal."<sup>2</sup> "The trials of public life," he wrote much later, when he had been dissuading a friend from taking a high appointment, "are not beneficent trials. They gnaw, and fret, and eat into the vitals, and rather add to the malignancies of life than lift us up nearer to the heavens."<sup>3</sup> The example of one who, having the opportunities of being pushed into prominence, steadily refused the inducement, and advised his fellows to do the same, may not be without its use as a study for those who are attracted by the glitter of promotion.

By the end of 1870 four volumes of Pope were ready, —the first two volumes of Poetry and the first two of Letters. Murray then thought the time had come when the publication might commence, and they were brought out a volume at a time, at intervals of two months, beginning in November, 1870. The work was received, as Forster said, "with praise and wonder," for its extra-

<sup>1</sup> Oct. 17, 1859.

<sup>2</sup> To Miss Holley, Dec. 21, 1881.

<sup>3</sup> Nov. 30, 1883.

ordinary editing. Forster himself said, when he had seen some of it in its early stages, that it would be "the best-edited English classic we have." On the other hand, of course, the severe criticisms on Pope and his poetry met with a good deal of disapprobation from his admirers. Elwin was more pleased with the commendation than he was vexed with the blame. He had fully anticipated the last, but had been diffident about his own skill in executing his task. "As to criticism," he wrote, "I am indifferent. Praise or censure seem such slight matters that I have no pleasure from the one or pain from the other."

Though this was true in a sense, he was more dependent than he supposed upon the opinion of others for encouragement or discouragement in his undertakings. It rather damped him, therefore, when Murray, rendered anxious by the adverse opinions which were expressed by some, began to fear that the work would be damaged by the editor's antagonism to his author, and begged him to moderate his tone in what was to come. "I rejoice," Elwin replied, "to receive your suggestions, and will say all the good of Pope I can, though I expected, and still expect, to be much attacked for speaking no better of him. This will do the edition no harm, for the public have no objection to criticism on Pope or anybody else, even when they blame it. Far from having any spite against the poor little man, I am only sorry I am obliged to be so hard on him. As to his poetry, I praise it quite as highly, and censure it less bitterly, than any great critic who has really examined it in recent days,—De Quincey, for instance, who was a consummate judge. My language is tame to his. The truth is that very much of Pope's verse is commonplace, and his genius is confined to the Rape of the Lock, the Epistle of Eloisa to Abelard, the



Dunciad, and particular passages of the Satires. This will be universally recognised in a few years. In the meanwhile my opinions seem more peculiar than they really are, because the newspaper critics are not well read in the profound criticisms of Coleridge, De Quincey, etc. But still I am obliged for your hint, and will do my best to show the sunny side of the peach."<sup>1</sup> "On one point," he added, "the common delusion is curious,—Pope is believed to be the most correct of poets, and he is indubitably the most ungrammatical of any eminent poet in the language."<sup>2</sup>

This was no new heresy on Elwin's part, freshly imbibed from dislike of his subject. Though he cared less for the poetry the more he worked at it, he had long before arrived at the general conclusions which he was now putting into print. As far back as 1855, before he had thought of editing Pope, he had written to Lord Brougham, "I admire Pope much, but Dryden far more. In variety, in force and freedom of language, the latter is much the greater of the two, and I thought literary men were now agreed in this preference. Johnson, in his famous parallel, gives the palm hesitatingly to Dryden, but Johnson commenced his career during the dictatorship of Pope, and he evidently lowered his tone out of deference to the fashion of the day. If you complain of Sir R. Peel, what will you say to Disraeli declaring the other night in the House of Commons that the *Essay on Man*—parts of Shakespeare excepted—was the finest poem in the English language? This is monstrous."<sup>3</sup>

Murray, finding that his remonstrances were unavailing, endeavoured to fortify his own opinion by that of others, and returned to the charge. "I cannot refrain," he wrote,

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Jan. 6, 1871.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Jan. 7, 1871.

<sup>3</sup> To Lord Brougham, May 5, 1855.

February 17th, 1871, "from again opening the subject of your bias against Pope as a poet. People of the most discordant opinions agree in this. At a dinner held this week—present, Gladstone, Lords Stanhope and Dufferin, Bob Lowe, editors of *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews*, Sir H. Holland—while all agreed in the highest praise of the editing, all strongly demurred to your judgments on the poetry, especially the *Essay on Criticism*. Gladstone, who was warmest perhaps in praise, summed up, 'It seems as though Elwin has edited Pope in order to show that he is not worth editing.'"

Elwin replied in a long letter, which explained his precise views about Pope. "You were," he says, "a distinguished company, and every one accomplished in literature. Even your statesmen were men of letters, and especially Bob Lowe, who is an admirable scholar, and has a vigorous intellect, and speaks delicious English, and would have been a very distinguished writer if he had taken to authorship. Therefore I admit to the full that they are high authorities. But, then, there are the highest authorities on the other side also. You will see from the quotations in my introductions that greater critics than I can pretend to be share my opinions. I could produce a long list of illustrious names who think in general of Pope's poetry as I do, although they have not spoken specifically of each poem. It is a curious fact that his works, from the hour of their publication, have been the great battle-ground of criticism. Men agree tolerably in their estimate of Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, etc., but upon the merits of Pope the differences are radical and insuperable. When Warton published his *Essay on Pope* there was a conflict. When Bowles published his edition there was a controversy which lasted as long as the War of Troy, and was as fierce

and bitter as words could make it. There can be no edition of Pope at present without a fray. The Pope party naturally seem in the ascendant, because my critics provoke a reaction, and when the Pope defenders have said their say, you will see that the opposite school will strike in and restore the balance. Thus, if I were to yield to authority, I should be in the position of the old man and the ass. I should receive, and in fact I do receive, diametrically opposite advice. But it is not a question of authority with me at all, for, next to my religious and moral creed, I have no opinions more fixed than those which I hold on the merits of such of our poets as I have studied. Right or wrong, I could not alter my views without a complete revolution in my literary tastes. I cannot conceive, for instance, that I could ever be brought to think that the *Essay on Criticism* was not a commonplace poem.

“I am particular in saying this, because I do not agree that Pope’s best poetry is to come. I think his masterpiece is the *Rape of the Lock*, and I believe no one has praised it more than myself. Next to the *Rape* I rank the *Epistle to Eloisa*, and this also, I think, I have praised as highly as any critic has done. But no doubt there is a great deal of adverse criticism on the other poems, and the praise gets overlooked at present. Of the remaining two volumes of poetry, I consider that there are admirable bits in the *Satires*, and that the *Dunciad* is a great poem of its kind; but on the other hand, I think that both the *Moral Essays* and *Satires* have a good deal in them that is poor,—that is, poor for a poet of Pope’s pretensions. This is the summary of my Pope creed.

“Allowing for the exaggeration which is incident to epigrammatic sayings, I admit that there is a great deal of truth in Gladstone’s remark. I remember old Dilke



saying, 'Think of me, devoting these years to Pope,—I, who do not admire his poetry, with the exception of the *Dunciad*!' The circumstance which made him devote the years to Pope, notwithstanding, was that he became possessed of the Caryll papers. The circumstance which made me Pope's editor was the scrap of paper Croker wrote to you with his dying hands (a few hours, I believe, before he breathed his last), requesting me to revise what he had done. I admire Pope's poetry far more than old Dilke did. But he is not an author I should have picked out of my own accord to edit. It is seldom we choose for ourselves in life; events choose for us.

"So it was that I began the undertaking. I had not then seen the Caryll letters. I had a general faith in Pope's worth, notwithstanding his infirmities, and I expected to be his champion as regards his moral character, and to do justice to his really great poems. When, bit by bit, I came to see the whole truth, my mind sickened over the task, and I often thought I should be compelled to throw it up. Nothing kept me to it except the feeling that to abandon it would throw back the edition again for years; and once, when I broached the idea, you were so strongly of the same opinion that I dropped the subject, and did not press the suggestion. I only mention this by way of letting you understand that I have no pleasure in depreciating him. It is most uncongenial to my mind to be objecting and censuring, and I long for somebody and something which I can praise with all my heart and soul.

"De Quincey says that no one who has not studied Pope with the intention of being his editor could ever see half his insincerities, inconsequences, exaggerations, etc., etc. He states that he studied him for the purpose of editing him, and abandoned the design from the

defects which were then revealed to his eyes, and from the feeling that it is disagreeable to a reader to have a disparaging commentary. I share this opinion. I think myself it is provoking, and I consider that your distinguished circle were very indulgent to me, and I feel grateful to them, especially as I am conscious of many defects, besides divergent views. I would read Pope with their eyes if I could, as I do freely recognise their right to speak with authority on him.

"You will understand that I do not in the least harden my mind against the criticism you send me. On the contrary, I wish to profit by it;—only there will still remain the fact that there have always been two opinions of Pope's poetry, and mine is not the opinion of those who rank him highest."<sup>1</sup>

Murray acknowledged what he called Elwin's "interesting and ingenious" reply,<sup>2</sup> and did not, for the moment, attempt to press his case further. Elwin's opinions were, indeed, on this, as on all else which he had studied, fixed, deliberate, and fearlessly honest. He wrote, on the same subject, to a friend, "I have not, in any one word I have written, considered whether it would be agreeable or disagreeable to public, or critics, or individuals. I have simply endeavoured to express my own convictions, whatever they might be, as plainly as I could, and if I did not do this from principle it would yet be policy, for in authorship, as in all other things, the saying is true that 'truth goes furthest.' As I have begun, so I shall go on. I write at my ease, because I have no fear of anybody before my eyes."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Feb. 18, 1871.

<sup>2</sup> Murray to Elwin, Feb. 21, 1871.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in an Obituary Notice of Whitwell Elwin in the *Quarterly Review*, vol. cxc. p. 297.

## CHAPTER XIII

1871-1878

ELECTION TO THE ATHENÆUM CLUB—ECCLESIASTICAL  
VIEWS—DEATHS OF A SON AND DAUGHTER—JOHN  
FORSTER—CHURCH RESTORATION—BOSWELL'S JOHN-  
SON AND POPE.

WHEN Elwin was editor of the Quarterly Review, and was constantly in London, his name had been put down as a candidate for admission to the Athenæum Club. It was always a great many years before a person's turn for election came, and it was not till the beginning of 1871 that Elwin reached his. His friends were so delighted at the prospect of seeing the past editor of the Quarterly and the present editor of Pope enrolled, that they immediately set themselves to secure votes for him. Directly he heard of this he wrote to Murray, "I fancied my name had been withdrawn years ago. If the business had gone forward, the best thing which could have happened to me would have been to be black-balled. I do not know what official I ought to write to, and am afraid of mistakes, which makes me ask you to have the kindness to walk down to the Athenæum and get my name erased. You will do a double service,—first to me, and secondly, to the person just below me, who is probably eager for admission. For anybody who is a month or two in the year in London, nothing could be more delightful than the Athenæum, and I should be disposed to imitate the



Archbishop of York, and live there. As it is, a club in Calcutta would be as useful to me; and, what is the weightiest reason of all, I have so many other things to do with my money."<sup>1</sup>

Murray replied that Elwin's certificate had been "so largely and honourably signed" that he could not withdraw without seeming discourteous to his supporters. "As regards expense," he generously added, "you need not distress yourself. You will hear nothing of that. *Je m'en charge.*"<sup>2</sup> Elwin therefore consented to stand. "I feel myself," he said, "the difficulty of removing my name after what you tell me of the signatures, especially as I know (though nobody has hinted it to me) that you and Forster have secured them by your personal influence. His and your zeal and kindness are absolutely unbounded. I shall not be annoyed if I am rejected, and if I am chosen I shall be proud and pleased. I will be a member for a year or two, at any rate, and I can then withdraw quietly if it seems inexpedient to go on."<sup>3</sup>

When the election was over, on February 20th, Murray wrote, "It is with especial pleasure I announce to you that last night you were triumphantly elected a member of the Athenæum,—only six balls against, which is nearly the smallest allowance of malignity on record in the club, members for the most part agreeing that you ought properly to have been brought in by the committee. I stayed out the whole ballot, and assure you the expressions of admiration and regard for you would have gratified you. Among the last who came in, but not the least in warmth, was Samuel of Winton!"<sup>4</sup> This was Bishop Wilberforce, against whom he had set himself when he fostered the Quarterly Review attack upon

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Feb. 16, 1871.

<sup>2</sup> Murray to Elwin, Feb. 17, 1871.

<sup>3</sup> To Murray, Feb. 18, 1871.

<sup>4</sup> Murray to Elwin, Feb. 21, 1871.

Cuddesdon College, in 1858. Elwin could not but be pleased at the cordiality of his friends. "It seems," he said, "very astonishing, and not to be explained; but I am gratified, and also grateful. I would not give twopence for all the fame in the world, but I love kindness and goodwill."<sup>1</sup> "What can I say to you for your kindness?" he wrote to Murray. "I cannot say enough, and therefore I will say nothing. I am delighted with what you tell me of the genial comments of the voters. I am aware it is considered a compliment to be elected by the committee. As it is, I prefer to come in with the goodwill of the members in general. Indeed, I care nothing for honour, and care very much for kindness and benevolent feelings, and that these should have been manifested is worth even more than the membership."<sup>2</sup> So far as belonging to the club went, he was able to make so little use of it that he retired as soon as he felt he could do so without offending the friends who had elected him.

Pope having now been fairly launched, Elwin felt that he must keep up the succession of volumes, and he commenced getting a new one on hand. He had, however, been overtaxing himself in the autumn of 1870, and he made little way. "I have been trying to get some work ready for the printer," he wrote in January, 1871, "and begun to fall ill again. When I sit down to my desk, my stomach immediately gets irritable, and I am obliged to leave off."<sup>3</sup> "I can still do nothing, or next to nothing, at my desk," he repeated in June.<sup>4</sup> It was soon evident that it would be impossible to maintain the issue of a new volume every two months, as had been intended. "If Pope," he wrote to Murray, by way of apology, "had been an honest man, the volumes might have followed

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Feb. 23, 1871.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, Feb. 22, 1871.

<sup>3</sup> To Miss Holley, Jan. 18, 1871.

<sup>4</sup> The same, June 4, 1871.

quick enough. As he was unhappily a systematic trickster, he gives me infinite trouble, which is at once ungrateful and indispensable."<sup>1</sup>

He was ill again in the autumn, but towards Christmas revived. "Life," he then wrote, "seems to me a different thing from what it did. I mean that my sensations are once more enjoyable, and not unmixed suffering."<sup>2</sup> Under the influence of revived spirits, he turned aside from Pope, for a week or two, at the request of the editor of the *Quarterly*, to write an article on the early years of Dickens, in review of the first volume of Forster's *Biography* then coming out. It was an act of friendship to both the subject and the writer of the *Life*. "It will probably satisfy no one," he said himself. "Forster will think it too lukewarm; others, perhaps, will think it the reverse. As for me, I had only one care, viz. that it should be true."<sup>3</sup> It was a bright little paper, in his best biographical style, incorporating all his own personal impressions of Dickens. Its only fault was, that never having a sequel, it remained an incomplete fragment. Far from being displeased with it, Forster thought it "charmingly done."

This completed, he again resumed his editorial work, giving the finishing touches to the third volume of Pope's correspondence, which contained a great number of new letters,—many of them important in their bearing on the poet's history and conduct. It came out in the spring of 1872, after a break of a year in the publication. Though the work still remained in his hands for some years, it was the last volume that came out under his own auspices.

While the editing of Pope was hanging like a millstone round his neck, he could embark on no other serious undertaking in literature, for, if he wrote at all,

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Aug. 11, 1871.

<sup>2</sup> Letter, Dec. 5, 1871.

<sup>3</sup> To Miss Holley, Dec. 27, 1871.



he felt that he was in duty bound to complete this first. The consequence was that his own inclinations gradually loosened themselves from literary work. With the relaxing of these there grew up another taste which presently assumed the predominant place in his mind. He had always been anxious to do something to his parish church at Booton. It was a mean edifice, in bad repair, and was ill-furnished within. He had not been able to attempt anything for its improvement till 1867, when he had begun to reseat the chancel. This small beginning soon suggested other things in its train. When the chancel was made decorous, the nave could not be left as it was, with its damp and hideous pews. From furnishing the interior he passed on to attend to the fabric. Repairing soon grew into rebuilding, and the rebuilding of one part necessitated the rebuilding of another. It ended in his constructing an entirely new and splendid church from chancel to tower; and this—perhaps the greatest work of his life—was the main occupation of the rest of his days. Characteristically, he made the whole business his own. He employed no architect, and did not even leave the execution in the hands of a builder. He designed everything himself, mastered every detail of the work, and superintended the whole of the operations.

He had always been interested in architecture, and he started upon Booton Church with a considerable amount of technical knowledge. Even at the period which we have reached, when his own building labours were at their commencement, and were much less ambitious than they became in their development, he was recognised as a reliable authority on the subject. He was a friend of Dr. Goulburn's, then Dean of Norwich, and through him was consulted by the Chapter as to the restoration of Norwich Cathedral. It was at Elwin's suggestion that

the bricked-up apse of the choir was opened, and by his intervention that the interesting remains of the old bishop's chair, discovered in its primitive position, were not ruthlessly taken away.

Ecclesiastical building, with its associations, helped to brush away some of the prejudices which had tinged the Quarterly articles with bitterness during the period of his editorship. Another influence in the same direction came from his son, Hastings Philip, who, after taking a first-class in the Moral Science tripos at Cambridge, went to Cuddesdon, and was ordained, in 1870, to the curacy of Helmsley, in Yorkshire, under the Rev. C. N. Gray, son of the well-known Bishop of Capetown. Through his son Elwin came to understand the motives and principles of the Church life that had grown out of the Oxford Movement, better than he had done when he had viewed them through the coloured glasses of the contributors to the Review. Philip was the son whose ill-health had caused the parents so much anxiety when he was an infant, and he had always remained weakly. His piety, ability, and simplicity—all of which were signal—seemed almost brought out into relief by the fragility of his frame, and they won admiration everywhere, and not least with his father. At first he mellowed towards Philip's high-church opinions without accepting them. "He is inspired," he wrote, "with the very soul of Christianity, and where this exists, the particular grade of churchmanship signifies little."<sup>1</sup> From this he went on to adopting, in a measure, ideas and practices which he would formerly have repudiated. He increased the Eucharists from once a quarter to once a month, introduced a little more seemly order into his ritual, adopted the eastward position, and made sundry other improvements in the conduct of the

<sup>1</sup> Letter Nov. 12, 1870.

services. At the end of 1870 he inaugurated an early Eucharist every Sunday, and a daily Matins at half-past eight, which involved earlier hours, and long habit made this an appreciable effort.

The change extended to his personal attire. During the greater part of his life he had been accustomed to dress on weekdays in a style that was not distinguishable from that of a sober layman, and he had often been taken for such by strangers in the literary world during his Quarterly editorship. Even in London, he wore an ordinary frock coat and open waistcoat, with black and white check trousers, which were only exchanged for black ones on Sundays. His collars were of the kind which was afterwards identified with Mr. Gladstone, simply because he continued to wear them after they had gone out of ordinary fashion. Round the collar was wound a long black silk neckcloth on weekdays, a white one on Sundays. "I never," he wrote to his sister Mary, in 1848, on her making him a present of a coloured necktie, "put on a white tie except on Sundays, for fear of being taken for a Roman Catholic clergyman in a transition state, or for what is the other end of the stick, a dissenting preacher." In 1857 he was persuaded to take to white neckcloths habitually, and received such a number of gratified remarks from a succession of friends on whom he called, that he came to the conclusion it must be a more important matter than he supposed. "You are really looking like a clergyman to-day," was the burden of their comments. Now, in 1871, he adopted, from his son's example, a clerical stock. Forster noted in his diary, on April 10th, the arrival of "the good Elwin, in a white high-church choker, which at my request he removed—his son Philip's doing."

The changing bent of Elwin's mind on Church topics was shown in 1870, when he was asked to read a paper



on Lay Agencies, at the Norwich Diocesan Conference. "The present question," he wrote, a few days before, when he was about to prepare for it, "is, Shall I advocate sisterhoods, or shall I not?" After weighing the *pros* and *cons* with impartial deliberation he decided in the affirmative, much to the surprise, and partly to the offence, of the low-church majority of the Conference. He spoke of the need of lay interest and lay help in general, and then said that, leaving out the question of the position of the laity in the executive of the Church, he would confine himself to their position with respect to spiritual ministrations. Having dwelt on the scope for these afforded by the miseries of town and country, he proceeded:—

"Among the manifestations of our time there is none more conspicuous than the yearnings of refined and educated women to toil on behalf of the lower orders of mankind. There is nothing novel in the aspiration. The novelty is in the larger proportions the desire has assumed, and in the outward organisation towards which the movement tends. The set of the tide in the minds of numerous fervent women is towards some kind of sisterhood. The work they propose to execute is as old as Christianity,—to teach the young, to tend the sick, to visit from house to house,—but whether congregated in special establishments, or residing in their own domestic circle (and, in my opinion, both arrangements are feasible and desirable), their aim is to make their charitable offices the business of life instead of the occasional employment of vacant hours. They would substitute concentrated for desultory exertions, continuous service for fitful aid. Nothing ought to tempt us to displace or disparage the precious labours of thousands who bestow upon their fellow-creatures the leisure snatched from indispensable duties. The real point is whether we should not avail

ourselves, in addition, of a second description of heroic help, which inwardly sighs to fulfil its ideal of Christian devotedness, and which at present, for want of being gathered into reservoirs, is largely running to waste. Nor must we omit among the characteristics of sisterhoods the distinctive dress, which, however immaterial it may seem antecedent to reflection, is in practice extremely important. The dress is the badge which accredits the messenger,—a panoply to protect her from insult, a letter of recommendation to secure her a welcome. The effect upon the sister herself is not insignificant. All persons have their hours of lassitude; many have their moments of levity. The dress is the uniform of a high and holy office, and a perpetual memento to its wearer that she must be true to her work, and not dishonour her garb.

“The cause of sisterhoods has been injured by the belief that they are necessarily Romanistic in their tendencies. I am satisfied that the objection is groundless, or sisterhoods would not have found an advocate in me. The first English churchman, as far as I am aware, who pleaded for sisterhoods was the great and good Robert Southey, whose voluminous works overflow with the evidence of his antipathy to Romanism. He said forty years ago that the neglect to avail ourselves of Sisters of Mercy was ‘a reproach to England,’ and he added, ‘There is nothing Romish in such associations; nothing but what is righteous and holy; nothing but what properly belongs to that religious service which the apostle James tells us is pure and undefiled before God.’ Southey did not mean that the actual sisterhoods were free from Romish superstition. He meant that the Romanism to which they were linked was not the essence of the system. Sisterhoods, in fact, are what their founders make them, and the rules and usages we think

pernicious can be replaced by the rules we think good. The heart of the scheme is in the work which the name imports. The Sister of Mercy is the messenger of Christ to the sinful, the sorrowing, the ignorant, and the destitute. When such is the Sister's mission, truth need not leave error the monopoly of the institution. It was at one time a common taunt to exclaim mockingly, 'Sister of Mercy! Sister of Misery!' There is still a disposition to regard Sisters of Mercy with the disfavour which prompted this derisive protest. But if the Church of England can take advantage of the spirit which has arisen, and can organise sisterhoods on her own principles, it will soon be acknowledged that the Sister of Mercy is in a loftier sense a Sister of Misery, since among all the saintly functions of gentle, pure, self-sacrificing woman, none can be worthier than to stand by the side of Misery and say, 'I am your Sister.'"

Elwin took a still more pronounced position when the Church controversies over ritual began to assume a serious shape. Without agreeing with all that was done or taught by high churchmen, he had no sympathy whatever with the efforts then made to suppress them. He therefore joined with them in signing one or two of the declarations of principle put out by their party, and took a particular pleasure in himself maintaining the eastward position when the Privy Council in 1871 ruled it to be illegal. When the Public Worship Regulation Act was passed in 1874, he immediately joined the English Church Union, and remained a member of it for the rest of his life, though he never took any active part in its proceedings.

The son who had so much to do with this turn in his ecclesiastical views, completely broke down in health in 1872, after two years' work. A lighter post was found for him as Chaplain of All Saints' Convalescent Hospital,



at Eastbourne, with no better result. Congenital heart disease incapacitated him for work. He struggled on, even while unable to stand without holding to a support, till the effort became impossible, and at the end of 1873 he went home to die. Hope wrestled with the stern fact almost to the last, even when dropsy had set in. "Philip has disease of the heart," Whitwell Elwin wrote to Lady Westmorland, February 23rd, 1874, "and can never, in any proper sense of the word, recover, and a few days since the medical man gave him over. But he has rallied a bit since, and we have a sort of remote and trembling hope that he may survive, and yet a hope so full of fear that we are tossed and torn by the fluctuations of our feelings." "Things have been looking very dark for us here," he wrote to one of his other sons the next day. "At the moment they seem a scrap brighter. But, upon the whole, unless God interposes with supernatural power, which is an element beyond prognostication, I should have no hope. Mother and myself are two poor, broken-down creatures. God will be good to us, His mercy being as infinite as our unworthiness. Still there are times when the flesh seems as if it would crack with the strain, despite the joy we ought to feel upon the purely spiritual grounds."

Immediately after this there came a relapse, and Philip died on February 28th, 1874. Elwin wrote of the event in the same strain that he had used of the brother's death, "We thought we should have been heart-broken, and we are rejoicing. God has answered my prayers in a different and far better way from what I desired. The blessing is literally unspeakable."<sup>1</sup> But the thanksgiving of spirit was accompanied by anguish of mind. "There is another side," he wrote to his old friend, Lady Westmorland, "the

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, March 1, 1874.

blank to ourselves, and you well know that love will suffer in spite of all consolations. Therefore we must weep for a time, and carry the secret wound always, as so many others do and have done."<sup>1</sup> Philip's influence had been extraordinary. "He was our oracle," wrote Elwin. "Simple as a child, assuming nothing to himself, never appearing to wish to exercise the slightest power, he was yet as a Joseph among us, and father and mother and brothers instinctively made obeisance to him; for he had one of those minds which, without any process of reflection and reasoning, seem instinctively to perceive what is right to be done in all perplexities, and it was him that each consulted, and his word was law. He was, in fact, the rock against which we every one of us leaned, and he, all the while gentle, humble, and unobtrusive, and apparently unconscious of the homage we paid him." "We can wait calmly," he added, "for time to mellow our grief."<sup>2</sup> It was so intense, however, that the parents rarely even mentioned their departed sons' names to each other. A year after Philip's death, the father sent a photograph of him to an old friend. "Even this little act," he said, "has kept me all the morning in tears."<sup>3</sup>

The prolonged anxiety so upset Elwin that it had brought on a succession of illnesses, and obliged him to lay aside his pen. He described his life in 1873 as "a useless, armchair, do-nothing existence," in which he "could only read, and think, and dream, and these to very small purpose indeed."<sup>4</sup> The death, when it came, relieved the suspense, but not the sorrow, and he still found himself very incapable. He tried to get on with Pope, but it was not to be expected that he would succeed

<sup>1</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, March 18, 1874.

<sup>2</sup> The same, March 30, 1874.

<sup>3</sup> To Miss Holley, May 28, 1875.

<sup>4</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, July 7, 1873.

in his depressed state of mind. Five weary volumes, which he felt would be coldly received as to their matter, lay between him and the *Life*,—to writing which he had once looked forward,—and he had already devoted fifteen years to accomplishing half the work. “I mourn,” he had already written to Murray, at the beginning of 1872, “the years I have spent on it, for it is really not worth the labour. So much time is lost in hunting out minute points, which yet cannot be passed over, that I believe I could write two volumes as soon as edit one. I am impatient to be at work upon other designs which are according to my own fancy, and though I shall go on with Pope till you light upon a substitute, yet if you should come upon anybody that you are willing to trust with the remainder of the task, I shall rejoice to resign it into his hands.”<sup>1</sup> Forster had remonstrated so vehemently against the idea of resignation that he did not press it at once again. He applied himself to dealing with the *Satires*, but made slow progress, and had to stop. At the beginning of 1873 he proposed that the next volume should definitely be his last. Murray, with excellent intentions, unfortunately suggested a reduction of the amount of annotations, thinking thereby at once to relieve the editor and diminish the adverse comments on Pope. This was fatal. Under encouragement Elwin might have been persuaded to complete the edition, but this confirmed his impression that he was not satisfying his publisher, and was destructive to his little remaining interest in the scheme. Nevertheless, from time to time, he attempted to resume, and when he had recovered a little from the first grief at his son Philip’s death, he made a final effort. “If I break down again,” he wrote to Murray, “it will be useless to continue the struggle.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Jan. 19, 1872.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, April 7, 1874



The struggle was soon rendered hopeless, at least for the time, by a fresh anxiety and sorrow. Scarcely had the parents lost their second son, when their only daughter Frances' health began to fail from anæmia. She was a lovable, gentle girl, of sixteen, more her father's companion than any of the other children had been, and the only one now remaining at home. In the autumn of 1874 she was taken to London by Mrs. Elwin to see Sir William Jenner,—“one of those rare men,” Elwin said, “who has a genius for his calling,—the only physician whose opinion I cared to have.”<sup>1</sup> The testimony was the more significant, because as a rule he did not place any reliance on the advice of medical men. “My faith in physicians,” he once wrote to Lady Westmorland, “is small, and I never consult them. I have talked too much with them, and know too well their own want of confidence in their science, to place any trust in them.”<sup>2</sup> Jenner gave hopes of Frances' recovery if she would give up study and take plenty of exercise. She was ordered to ride, but “a suitable horse,” the father wrote, “appears to be almost as rare an animal as a phoenix.” At last he borrowed a pony, and took her out for rides, running himself on foot by her side. He devoted himself to her with feverish anxiety. Dr. Norman Moore, an old college friend of Philip Elwin's, who had become intimate at Booton rectory, and was now a physician in London, was unwearied in his visits and efforts to save the girl's life. Nothing, however, availed. “Our hearts are full of anguish,” Elwin wrote, October 29, 1875, “and it almost seems as if we must drop. We are hardly able to do our part in life.”<sup>3</sup> On the 12th of November, after

<sup>1</sup> To his wife, 1874.

<sup>2</sup> To the Countess of Westmorland, April 8, 1858.

<sup>3</sup> To his son, Oct. 29, 1875.

a week of strained watching while the end was hourly expected, she too passed away, leaving the home desolate. "Grief," Elwin wrote, the same day, "is swallowed up in triumph. I am very, very happy." This was the true expression of his faith, but a deep, silent pang settled down on the parents' minds. The mother never after laid aside her mourning, nor did he ever return to his old weekday attire. He could not sit in his study at the rectory, because it recalled to him delightful hours, when he had read Latin with this child, whose place was now a blank. Finding himself disturbed elsewhere, when visitors were in the house, he once rearranged the room so as to try and efface the association, that he might be able to occupy it; but it still revived the suffering, and he never used it again,—never entered it unless he was obliged. The sorrow was not continuously active, but gaiety rarely asserted itself again in him with the light-hearted buoyancy of earlier years. There was no repining, no morbid wish that it might have been otherwise, no useless regrets, but both father and mother thenceforth spoke of their lives as a remnant which had only to be finished.

In most careers there comes a time when people begin to outlive their contemporaries. Elwin was now sixty, and many of his compeers were passing away, because he had been younger than most when he took his place among the men of his period. The losses in his home circle drove him so much into seclusion that, as one after another of his former associates dropped, they left a smaller gap in his life than would have been the case if he had not withdrawn from society. Nevertheless each fresh death touched him, and added something to the gloom. "You have no idea," he wrote to Murray, February 8th, 1876, "of the number of relatives and friends we have lost in the last

three or four years. They have been years of perpetual agitation and sorrow to us. Then, for many a long month in 1875, I lived in the dark shadow of our darling's coming death—the anxiety preying on my mind in sleepless nights as well as by day. Yet, as sorrow is a sort of stimulant, I was not much conscious that it wore me, till the lovely close of a lovely life removed the anguish, and then after a week or two I suddenly collapsed. I could not eat without turning sick, or walk without fainting, or understand what I read. Even the letters of the words were partially invisible to me, and while some were quite plain, others disappeared, and their place was a blank on the page. This state of inaction has been very distressing to me, and, as far as my individual feelings were concerned, I should have longed to be worse if I was not to be better. However, I mended, and was in a kind of middle state, between illness and recovery, when I got a pathetic letter from Lady Westmorland entreating me to go to her because of her own troubles. I set off immediately, and it was a little too much for me. Her medical man told me I had fever and bronchitis, that I must go at once to bed, and not think of returning home, which would be dangerous. I came back all the faster, and was not at poor dear Forster's funeral, because I was only just out of bed."

Forster had died on February 1st, 1876. He had been in miserable health for years, but the end came suddenly. His affection for Whitwell Elwin had been immense. When their acquaintance was still fresh, he had written, "Most welcome was your letter this morning, as your letters always are to me. They come fraught with some new proof of the true, warm-hearted, generous friend who has made life worth something more to me than it was a year ago."<sup>1</sup> They had only known one another for two

<sup>1</sup> Forster to Elwin, Nov. 14, 1854.



years and a half, when he wrote, "There are not many people I care to hear from or write to. Except Dickens and yourself, I hardly know of one. Were I to ask myself what friendship, out of all I value, I think most solidly fixed and reliable, the answer would be, Yours."<sup>1</sup> When Forster married, in 1856, he proposed to come to Norfolk for the wedding, that Elwin might officiate, and when he found that this was incompatible with legal formalities, he insisted that his friend must come to him. He never wavered in his attachment to him. Sometimes he would be momentarily vexed at some fancied neglect, but the instant they met, it was again, "the noble Elwin," "the good Elwin," "as ever, most delightful," "kinder and more considerate than ever." "Never were letters so pleasant to me as yours," he wrote in 1865, "and it is sad to think that from months we are now getting to years with hardly a single letter. And so often as we talk of you, and so truly as we love you!"<sup>2</sup> "My dear fellow," he wrote again, "with the ranks so thinning around us, should we not close up—come nearer to each other? None are so dear to us here at home as Mrs. Elwin, and you, and all of you."<sup>3</sup> "Dear Elwin here," he wrote the last time Elwin stayed there, in 1874, "dear old friend. Our meeting very delightful to me."<sup>4</sup> "Precious letter from dearest Elwin" was one of the last entries in his diary.<sup>5</sup> It was the letter that announced the death of Frances Elwin.

It was difficult to return a friendship with such ardour as this, but Elwin was very fond of Forster. "I know no kinder or more honourable man," he wrote to Lord Brougham, "none more earnest and diligent in whatever he undertakes, and very few who are abler."<sup>6</sup> "Forster

<sup>1</sup> Forster to Elwin, May 6, 1856.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Feb. 6, 1865.

<sup>3</sup> The same, May 23, 1869.

<sup>4</sup> Forster's MS. Diary, July 22, 1874.

<sup>5</sup> Dec. 10, 1875.

<sup>6</sup> To Lord Brougham, Aug. 16, 1855.

has a number of admirable qualities," he wrote in 1861, "and I have a particular regard for him, and often delight in his society."<sup>1</sup> He was not universally popular, for with all his warm-hearted kindness he sometimes gave offence by an irascible manner. "The dear fellow," Dickens wrote to Elwin on one occasion, "was here yesterday morning smoking all over his head, and fuming himself like a steam-boat ready to start."<sup>2</sup> "Forster's temper was hasty," Elwin said of him in print, "and in conjunction with his emotional nature there was a physical cause for the effervescence which ordinary observers did not guess. The strain upon his system, in the many years of unintermittent mental toil, rendered his nerves intolerant of ruffles which would have pressed unheeded in health. Slight contrarieties were as chafings against inflamed flesh."<sup>3</sup> "He was two distinct men," he wrote to Murray, "and the one man quite dissimilar to the other. To see him in company I should not have recognised him for the friend with whom I was intimate in private. Then he was quiet, natural, unpretending, and most agreeable, and in the warmth and generosity of his friendship he had no superior. I am his deep debtor for many years of signal, unwearied kindness, and never had so much as a momentary ruffle with him. Sensitive as he was in some ways, there was no man to whom it was easier to speak with perfect frankness. He always bore it with gentle good nature."<sup>4</sup> Elwin had himself often taken his advice on literary matters, and, if he had ever written the *Life of Pope*, he intended to dedicate it to Forster as a memorial of their friendship.

Forster left Elwin his gold watch and a legacy of £2,000, besides which there was an uncanceled bequest of £1,500 to Frances Elwin, whom he had always chosen

<sup>1</sup> Letter, March 27, 1861.

<sup>2</sup> Dickens to Elwin, June 3, 1859.

<sup>3</sup> *Memoir of John Forster*, p. xiv.

<sup>4</sup> To Murray, Feb. 8, 1876.

to regard as his goddaughter. Out of this sum the parents eventually filled the large west window of Booton Church with stained glass. Unknown to Elwin, Forster had appointed him one of his executors, in concert with Lord Lytton and Mr. J. W. Chitty, afterwards Chief Justice. Lord Lytton had just been appointed Viceroy of India, and was on the point of leaving England, which threw the work upon the other two. They roughly divided it, Mr. Chitty making himself responsible for the legal, and Elwin for the literary part of the business. The latter was considerable. Forster had left an edition of Landor's Works in progress, and only partly printed. His library, including manuscripts, he had bequeathed to South Kensington Museum, and the arrangements in connection with this involved much negotiation. Most laborious and difficult of all, his private letters and papers were put in the hands of the executors, either to destroy or to place at South Kensington, according to their discretion. This responsible duty necessitated the careful reading of thousands of letters, for Forster had corresponded with many persons of note, had been the intimate confidant of several of his friends, and had kept large masses of his correspondence. The manuscripts were sent down to Booton in several boxes, which Elwin diligently worked through. His own inclination, and Forster's instructions, were both in the direction of destroying all personal letters, however eminent the writer might be, but he none the less scrupulously examined everything, spending some months almost exclusively on the task.

Elwin derived increasing solace from the rebuilding of his chancel during these unhappiest years of his life. The very deaths that had saddened it seemed to draw his mind upwards, into an atmosphere of thought which found



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INTERIOR OF BOOTON CHURCH, AS REBUILT.

a congenial outlet in the construction of a building dedicated to purposes which touched another world. On a Sunday, in 1878, when the Old Testament lesson was the account of David's preparations for building the Temple, he said he was "immensely impressed with the importance of our religious edifices. . . . How often I have yearned for the power to make our own church what it ought to be! How my heart swelled with exultation to think that my life's desire would be fulfilled in the chancel, and that there it would be, in its solemn loveliness, to speak to the souls of present and future generations!"

The style he chose for his building was the transition between Early English and Decorated. The former was too severe, the latter too ornate, for his taste; the transition exactly represented his idea of religious beauty in stone. For the exterior walls he used the fine sea flints of the East coast which make such an effective feature in Norfolk churches.

He was very much handicapped by a total inability to draw. He once told Lady Westmorland that he thought drawing and painting "a delightful and enviable art," and that he had "tried hard to acquire it in days gone by, but could never draw anything truly." He could not even make a crude sketch to guide his own eye or to copy a model. He had to look at specimens, select his ideas from them, piece them together, modify and harmonise them, entirely in his own brain. Here his long habit of mental construction came to his aid. "I have mused over the design," he said of one part of the work—and it was equally true of all—"till I have got every line of it painted on my retina."<sup>2</sup>

When his own conception was matured there came the still more difficult task of transferring it from his

<sup>1</sup> Letter, Aug. 8, 1878.

<sup>2</sup> To Miss Holley, Aug. 23, 1876.



mind to that of the builder, with only the aid of the illustrations which had assisted himself. For a while he kept a kind of museum of grotesque specimens which had been brought as the first editions of some beautiful feature that he had endeavoured to describe, and had in the end obtained by gradually correcting misapprehensions. The transactions involved were often somewhat of a trial to him at the time, though a comedy in the retrospect. He was as fastidious in art as in literature. If a thing was not what he wanted, or if he saw on reflection that it could be done better, he would reject or alter work regardless of cost until he was satisfied. Some parts of the chancel were reshaped as many times as some of his manuscripts had been rewritten for the press.

As the designs had to be the best he could frame, so the manner in which they were executed had to be the best that could be devised. He built with such solidity that, when an alteration had to be made, it almost defied the chisels to cut away the formidable concrete in which everything was fixed. "What is done, is well done," he said, as his chancel approached completion, "and will stand till the next earthquake at Booton." "The work has its ups and downs, like sick people," he wrote again, "but, in spite of all, we continue to mount, and, also in spite of all, I believe we have built like Sir C. Wren, for eternity."<sup>1</sup>

All the windows were filled with stained glass, to which he devoted the same pains in design and execution as to the rest. In this department, as in the others, he had thought over the subject so thoroughly that he had arrived at distinct and even peculiar theories of his own. "I want," he said, "walls and windows and roof to say to all who enter, 'This is the House of God: this is the

<sup>1</sup> Letters, July 11 and Aug. 9, 1876.

House of Prayer.' So, too, there should be the calmness and repose which suggest the peace which passes all understanding. I would have faces majestic and devout, but with the sweetness and serenity which are the permanent attribute of religion. The trials and sufferings are transitory, the joys are lasting: and the language of the building should be in keeping with the enduring characteristic. I do not like representations of the Crucifixion in a church. The troubled soul finds strength and repose in that which is itself full of peace and repose, and not in the contemplation of torture and sorrow. The aspect of a church should be to calm the worshipper, and raise him above the disturbances of earth into the peacefulness of heaven."<sup>1</sup>

In the early stages, when everyone was raw to this novel kind of church-building, many mistakes were made. Elwin recorded them to his friends with a merry philosophy. "I had great difficulty in resisting the temptation to assassinate him," he wrote of one misdemeanant, "or more properly to execute him, which would still have been far too mild a punishment for him. When I had exhausted myself by my vehemence, and terrified him into suppleness, I had to devise ways and means for counteracting his imbecile blunders." On another similar occasion he said he had written a tradesman "a letter of thunder and lightning, with a long catalogue of his offences and the most cutting comments on them he could think of." "On Monday morning," he said, "he appeared at the door, looking so aged, so haggard, so bent, and altogether so shabby (the whole of which I ascribed to his mental misery since he received my letter), that I repented my severity, and wished I had been more forbearing." When he had finished his homily, the man explained that he was only a relation of the culprit, and that he had come to ask

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Aug. 25, 1876.

the rector to do him a favour. Elwin was, in truth, very indulgent to those who worked for him, and many were the favours he did for them while his church was rebuilding.

By the time the chancel was approaching completion, he had determined that it was impossible to leave the old and shabby nave as its adjunct, and that he must rebuild the whole church by degrees. This was a much larger undertaking than he had contemplated at first, and he felt that he must qualify himself by a diligent study of the best specimens of architecture. He therefore made an expedition, with a couple of friends, to visit the southern and midland cathedrals. The tour began with Ely, Peterborough, and Lichfield. They then went by Birmingham to Worcester and Hereford, and thence to Bristol, where the hotels were full, and they had to put up at Clifton. The memories of early days associated with this place—his engagement and all the bright prospects of the first years of his married life—were too much for Elwin's tender feelings, and his friends were glad to get him away. From here they turned homewards, visiting Salisbury and Winchester on their way. At the last place Elwin was surprised to see scratched on the window-pane of the George Hotel, where they stopped, his own coat of arms, with the inscription: "Peter Elwin, Caius College, Cambridge, 1748." It had been etched by his grandfather, who had taken a month's tour in that year with four other undergraduates.

This cathedral round, which occupied nearly three weeks, was a great success. Elwin enjoyed it more than he had enjoyed anything since death had visited his family, and he recognised it as the turning-point at which he began to recover his strength. Physically, he still had frequent attacks of ill-health, but the change of scene had taken



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Bootton Rectory  
Norwich

Dec: 21: 1874

My dear Murray,

I have sent by book-post to day  
the 2 volumes of Johnsoniana. When you  
send the interleaved volumes put with them  
a second copy of Croker's 1 vol. ed which I can  
cut up since some of the matter will have  
to be transferred to the Johnsoniana. I hope we  
shall manage to get together all the scattered  
matter which is of any value. At least I  
will spare no pains. All good wishes from  
all of us to you & your belongings.

Always

Most sincerely yrs  
W. Elwin.

his mind off his sorrow, and enabled him to look upon life again with a cheerful face.

At the close of 1874 he had undertaken to edit Boswell's Johnson for Murray, while he was still ostensibly editing Pope, but practically had almost ceased to touch it. Early in 1878 other editions of the work were threatened, and Murray wrote to inquire after Elwin himself, and after the promised book. Elwin replied, "If I do not write, it is only because I have nothing to tell except the same dull, monotonous story. My life for the last three or four years has been mainly a struggle for existence, with gleams of better days, but still with such a susceptibility that a little casual over-exertion threw me back, and I paid for a few hours of imprudence by weeks of illness. [A friend's] medical attendant tells me that more people die at sixty, or a little after, than at any other age, and that most of the survivors have a battle at this crisis. If they conquer, he says, they then commonly enjoy another lease without disturbance. Under all my circumstances the wonder is, not that I should have had to pass through the conflict, but that I should have survived it. I gained in strength last year. On the whole, I have continued to improve since, but this mild winter has been fruitful in bronchitis, and I have had more than my share of it. Nevertheless, I am better in constitution, and, if my present prospects are realised, I may expect to get back to my old normal state in the course of the summer.

"The Boswell, when you saw it, was far from completed. I have done a good bit to it since, and it is not completed now. But there is another and more important point. A few weeks since, when I was confined to my bed, I read through all my notes, and at every page I had an increasing perception how much the whole required revision. Much of the commentary was written in the



languor of sickness, and showed the traces of it. This revision I commenced lately, and to be serviceable it must be thorough. To publish the thing as it is would be to ruin it. The best edition of Boswell is the one which will ultimately prevail, and I could not send an edition to the press which I myself condemned in advance. Neither could I run a rival race with an editor, and revise my notes in a sort of scramble. If I could bring my mind to it, my body would render it a physical impossibility. In the state in which I am at present, to put on a spurt, even for a day or two, is to incapacitate myself for doing anything. I can work now with comfort, but only leisurely, and within the limits of my average bodily powers. Will is of no avail without vigour. Since, therefore, you must publish at once, it seems to me that far the wisest, indeed the only, course is to reprint Croker's edition. His ideas, in many respects, differ widely from mine; but the book has a certain reputation, and a unity of its own, and I should suppose would hold its own against a rival edition extemporised for the occasion. I love Boswell's book, and I love Johnson, and give up my function with great regret. But I am helpless in the circumstances which have arisen. A higher power has settled the question, and it would be vain for me to dream of entering the lists. Yesterday I was in such pain after my services that I was obliged to go to bed, and so it would be with two or three days of driving work with my pen."<sup>1</sup>

Always unselfish as regards his literary work, he handed over the greater part of his materials to a friend who was selected to try his hand on the task, although he had not entirely relinquished the hope of accomplishing it himself in the future.

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, April 8, 1878.

At the same time, in April, 1878, he finally relinquished all idea of finishing Pope, and returned the books and manuscripts which Murray had acquired for it. He was in some concern, however, at throwing a half-completed edition on his hands, and welcomed the news, when the publisher wrote three months later to tell him that Mr. W. J. Courthope had agreed to edit the remainder. Elwin cordially offered to give him any information in his power that might assist him in the work.

## CHAPTER XIV

1878-1888

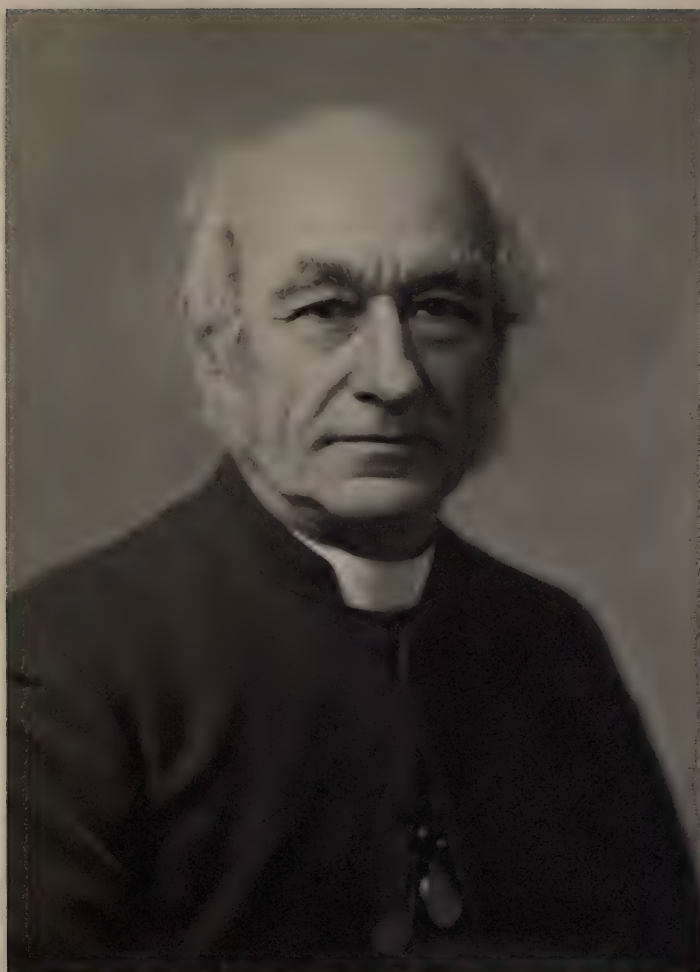
ECCLESIASTICAL AND POLITICAL POLEMICS—ARCHITECTURE—LOVE OF ANIMALS—JOHN MURRAY—THE EARL OF LYTTON—AID AS A COUNSELLOR.

WHEN Elwin had regained his placidity of mind he settled down to the last stage of his life, which was the least eventful part of it, but probably the most useful. Throughout his whole career he had systematically looked for the hand of Providence in the chapter of events, had sought nothing for himself, and had mainly seen in circumstances the opportunities for good. Now, with a character chastened by affliction and ripened by wide experience, he devoted himself almost wholly to helping other people. Sorrow had toned down some of the vehemence of his disposition; and, if this ever seemed to be a loss, it was more than compensated by an increase of patience and benignity. Tender in all his feelings, he could not but feel acutely the trials which had crossed his path, but even with regard to the death of his children he rejoiced for those whom it had liberated, and applied himself to turn to account the altered conditions of his life.

One effect of the change was that he rarely went away from home, and became increasingly engrossed in the affairs of his little parish. Always the kindest of friends to the poor, he now more and more entered into the details



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of their life, and identified his interests with theirs. Every clergyman is used to perform little offices for his poor parishioners. There was nothing extraordinary in the fact that the Rector of Booton would break into valuable hours by carrying beef-tea to a sick person, would sit with someone who had an infectious disease, would devote time and trouble to making arrangements for somebody's advantage, or would make charitable presents to needy families. But there was a singular large-heartedness in the extent to which he did these things, and self-forgetfulness in his manner of doing them. It was the same in his relation with those outside his parish. He never grudged doing what anybody wanted of him, however much it was at the cost of what some would have thought more important avocations.

Elwin made some efforts at returning to literary work, but they were not very considerable, nor did anything come of them. In 1878 Dr. William Smith, who was then editing the *Quarterly Review*, hoped he might be enticed into using his pen if he were given a congenial topic, and knowing that he was engrossed in church-building, invited him to write an article upon architecture. Elwin felt he would like to do this till he read the book he was to review, when he found it too inadequate to provide him with matter. He then thought he would take William Cobbett for a subject, but found it unsatisfactory. A few years after, in 1884, he wished to pay a tribute to his old friend, Lord Lyndhurst, by a biographical article, but could not get the materials he wanted without more research than he had the means for in the country. Now and then he talked of a wish to write a *Life* of his own great model, Burke,—“a man,” he said, “who, whether as a statesman, a thinker, or an orator, was without an equal.”<sup>1</sup> But he

<sup>1</sup> *Quarterly Review*, vol. ciii. p. 495.



believed himself to be too old to embark on so large a scheme, and never seriously contemplated the attempt.

His pen was used in other ways than in providing matter for the press. His working hours, when not taken up by his church restoration and his parish, were largely given to correspondence. He did not write to very many people, and he still often left letters unanswered, but those he did write occupied a great deal of time. They were rarely the gossiping notes of a casual friendship, but were almost always written with some special object, on some defined subject, upon which he had distinct views to impart. Consequently they were much too exact to be scribbled off in a hurry. He usually thought out what he had to say thoroughly, carefully composed the wording in his mind, often made a rough draft, which was revised before it was copied out. Many of these letters were really small essays. However intimate a friend the correspondent might be, it made no difference to the precise care lavished on their composition. Few who received them knew how much labour they cost. One letter was often a morning's work. A less elaborate epistle might perhaps sometimes have served its purpose as well; but the minute pains was very characteristic of the writer's love of thoroughness and excellence, and of his sense of the intrinsic importance of anything that was worth doing at all.

Most frequently such letters were addressed to friends. Now and then, though rarely, they were called forth by public events in which he felt a call to intervene. One such occurred in 1878, when the ritual prosecutions under the Public Worship Regulation Act were in full swing. Among those who were attacked was the Rev. R. W. Enraght, Vicar of Holy Trinity, Bordesley, in Birmingham, and Elwin felt an interest in the case

because his third son happened to be a curate at the church. When matters were growing serious, he endeavoured to interpose by an argumentative appeal to Bishop Philpott, of Worcester, "based upon three propositions—first, on the necessity for tolerating some varieties of opinion in an established church; secondly, on the fact that these varieties exist, and have always existed, in the Church of England, and this in particulars which are at variance with undoubted, undisputed law; thirdly, on the assumption that the bishops were not prepared to enforce the law all round on all persons alike, and deprive the Church of a freedom which I have been accustomed to think was essential to its existence."<sup>1</sup> "Besides the claim of the ritualists," he said, "to an equal toleration with the other sections of the Church, they have an especial claim to toleration in their interpretation of the Ornaments rubric, when many of the highest authorities, legal and ecclesiastical, believe that the ruling of the Privy Council was wrong, and was even based upon an historical fiction. A Church which does not tolerate in a case like this must either be inconsistent in the measure of freedom she deals out to her various members, or else, instead of being the most tolerant of all Churches, she must become the least." "I am not pleading my own cause," he added; "I am not open to prosecution, though this, perhaps, may be mainly because I am threescore and three, and was born too early to come within the influences which prevail with many of my juniors. I do not the less admire and honour the men and their work. I pray with all my soul that the Church of England may be large enough to contain them. I cannot persuade myself that even the Church of England is so rich in learned and self-denying ministers as to be able to spare them from her service. I cannot bring myself to

<sup>1</sup> To Bishop Philpott, July 3, 1878.

believe that the spiritual darkness in our parishes will be diminished by extinguishing these bright and burning lights. On the contrary, as a clergyman of the Church of England, who venerates his Church, I must confess that I am aghast at the thought that the ritualists should be told, in the name of the Church, that they must abandon their convictions or lay down their office, that they should be informed that they are beyond the limits of Church of England toleration, and can no longer be suffered to discharge their holy functions within our pale.”<sup>1</sup>

Bishop Philpott replied that Elwin’s arguments were “excellent and convincing for the remodelling of our rubrics, and for the establishment of some better form of legislation in ecclesiastical matters; but,” he added, “I cannot adopt them as of force to persuade a bishop to set himself up against or above the law, when it has been clearly declared and published.”<sup>2</sup> Elwin retorted, “The law, it is true, has been *clearly* declared, but we are all aware that many of the ablest lawyers contend that it has not been *rightly* declared. . . . A large body of enlightened enquirers have a belief that the judgment was formed under a bias, and has reversed the law which it purports to declare. . . . The uprightness of judges does not put them above all human infirmity. In past years I mixed much in social life with many distinguished members of the bench, some of whom were my intimate friends, and I can testify that they did not hesitate upon occasions to affirm in private that the opinions of the man had influenced the decisions of the judge. I well remember that Lord Brougham one morning put into my hand a letter he had just received from Baron Alderson, in which, after sharply criticising a recent judgment of Dr. Lushing-

<sup>1</sup> To Bishop Philpott, June 21, 1878.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Philpott to Elwin, June 24, 1878.



ton for its alleged perversion of the law, the Baron wound up with the remark, 'This is what comes of having a man of puritanical views for an ecclesiastical judge.'"<sup>1</sup> Elwin continued his letter by reiterating his main arguments, and the bishop responded by reiterating his obligation to abide by the law as interpreted at the time.<sup>2</sup> Elwin closed the correspondence by saying, "Every man believes in his own views, and I hold to my arguments in favour of toleration. But your principle, I admit, is impartial and consistent. It is a principle, however, which will involve us, all the same, in great conflicts and confusion, though with the ultimate result of securing that toleration which is now withheld. When once it is clearly known that the bishops will enforce whatsoever is law, simply because it *is* law, all sections of the Church will unite in contending against a regulation which I cannot but believe will be found to be incompatible with the inevitable workings of the human conscience. This is not a mere personal impression, but a widespread conviction."<sup>3</sup>

It was rarely that Elwin intervened publicly in political affairs, the polemics of which he considered were best left outside a clergyman's range of action. He made an exception in January, 1879, when a neighbour, who had changed his politics, asked him for assistance at a Conservative meeting at Reepham, just before a parliamentary election. Elwin admired his courage in avowing his altered convictions, and, with little preparation, made a great speech, which was printed and widely circulated, and was credited with influencing a great many votes. It was the period of the Berlin Treaty, which terminated the war between Russia and Turkey. Elwin reviewed the circum-

<sup>1</sup> To Bishop Philpott, June 27, 1878.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Philpott to Elwin, July 1, 1878.

<sup>3</sup> To Bishop Philpott, July 3, 1878.

stances which led up to it, commenting on the daring attitude by which England had checked Russian aggression. He said, "It has been made a taunt against our Government that it pushed its chivalry too far, and singly, or almost singly, braved the danger, while others shared the advantage. The danger was immense and would not wait, and we ought all the more to do honour to ministers, because in the pressing moment of peril they were singly equal to the hazard; because by their instant readiness to draw the sword they drove Russia to sheathe it; and because they have won for us an equitable peace by not being afraid of what, in reality, would have been a defensive war. The firm will which extorted the Treaty of Berlin is now required to enforce it. Russia has exhibited evidence on more than one occasion that she would evade it if she dared, and when you are reaping the fruits of a sagacious, comprehensive, and triumphant policy,—a policy which protects Austria, so indispensable to the European equilibrium; which restores efficacy to the potent voice of England; which secures our highway to India; which promises gradually to renovate the splendid domain that is still left to Turkey,—you will surely not think it wisdom to supplant its authors, and to appoint those persons to watch over the fulfilment of the treaty who contend that the policy is pernicious,—discreditable to the Government which originated, and to the Parliament which approved it."

He next explained the motives for the war in Afghanistan, and again supported the action of the Conservative Government, summing it up thus: "We are simply saying by the Afghan war that we must have the door of our house in our own keeping, and that we cannot leave it in the custody of the housebreaker's accomplice. War for the sake of territorial conquests has ceased to be a passion

with England. The continental statesmen do her the justice to confess it. Her ambition is to consolidate and civilise what she possesses, and she does not desire to add to dominions which already girdle the earth and upon which the sun never sets. I am sure that we are much more anxious that the old boast should continue true in a figurative than in a material sense, and that the one thing we have most at heart is to take care that the sun of England's justice and mercy shall never set upon the territories committed to her charge. To no country do we stand more deeply pledged than to India. We have done her wrongs in times past; we owe her the debt we are paying now, and you can never consent that this sun of civilisation, bright as India's radiant solar beams, should suffer an eclipse through the invading hordes of semi-barbarous Russia. Therefore it is that, warned by present danger, we are taking security for the future, and have determined, in the interests of the vast Indian continent, that the mountain passes, which are the gates, shall henceforth be kept by our own sentinels, and not by open enemies or pretended treacherous allies."

These two utterances,—the one on ecclesiastical and the other on secular politics,—were almost the only two occasions on which Elwin interfered with public events during his later years. His good offices were mainly reserved for private assistance. An instance of the exact care with which he entered into questions on which his advice was asked is afforded by a correspondence with the Rev. Sidney Pelham,<sup>1</sup> in 1879, which has the additional interest of defining the principles that guided him in the rebuilding of his own parish church. Mr. Pelham was Vicar of St. Peter Mancroft, in Norwich, a large

<sup>1</sup> Son of Bishop Pelham, of Norwich, afterwards Canon of Norwich Cathedral, and now Archdeacon of Norfolk.



Perpendicular church, which was in need of restoration. Elwin was consulted as to the choice of an architect. He recommended Street. "For some reason or another," he said, "not easy to understand, his original designs, while very striking in some parts, are, to my thinking, weak in others, and there is a certain want of unity in the effect of all his large buildings which I have happened to see. But he is a first-rate restorer. His knowledge of Gothic architecture in all styles is immense, and it extends to the minutest details of the work in every direction. His taste and judgment are both admirable, and, having a great reverence for old work, he is an adept in the most difficult task of knowing what to leave and what to renew."<sup>1</sup>

The recommendation led to the enunciation of his own views on the comparison between old and new architecture. He wrote to Mr. Pelham, "When, after a long interval, church-building revived, the ecclesiastics were not, as in old days, the architects. Architecture had become a profession distinct from religion, and it was no longer the religious idea which inspired the work. The designer had certain artistic ideas of beauty, but he was not a man filled with devout and solemn feelings, and who laboured to produce a place of worship in correspondence with his own fervent impressions. Hence the inferiority of the bulk of modern churches, until very recent days, in respect of religious expression. The notion did not enter into the mind of the architect. He was an artist, and nothing more. Even in the old mediæval work you can see how the secular feeling was gaining ground in the Perpendicular period. The style keeps growing lighter and less solemn, and the invariable rule prevails that the work answers to the predominant thought of the contriver. Still, the work

<sup>1</sup> To the Rev. S. Pelham, March 13, 1879.

was very fine, and the roofs superb, for the old spirit was not extinct, though on the whole more secular than in earlier days. In our generation the study of the old buildings, which had become almost a dead language to people in general, has taught us once more the principle which presided over their construction. But it is from the artistic point of view that architects ordinarily, in the first instance, take up with the profession, and the majority of architects are not possessed by the thoughts of which the art should be the vehicle.”<sup>1</sup>

“I have seen several modern churches,” he wrote again, “in which a religious effect has been attained, and that too by very simple means, but in the majority of cases you see at once that no notion of the kind has ever entered into the mind of the architect. In other instances it has apparently been aimed at and missed. . . . The bad work prejudices the good. Many persons are jealous of rich architecture, either because they consider it a party badge, or because they look upon it as an attempt to substitute impressions on the senses for spiritual worship. And, in so far as it is mere artistic adornment, without religious meaning, I myself think it misplaced. Its fitness for its purpose seems to me indispensable. Assume this to be attained, and then the objections are shortsighted, for all our spiritual instruction comes to us through our senses, and much of it in the same way as in architecture, through our eyes. ‘The heavens declare the glory of God,’ and ‘the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead.’ The House of God may declare the glory of God likewise, in so far as it is given to man to infuse a divine spirit into works made with hands, and the very structure of the temple, like the

<sup>1</sup> To the Rev. S. Pelham, March 18, 1879.

wonders of creation, though in an inferior degree, may raise the mind, by its sacred aspect, to the readier contemplation of Him to whom the temple is dedicated. There are some people who are below such impressions—that is, their minds have never been opened to their influence; and possibly there may be some who are above them—that is, may be so habitually wrapt up in devotion that they are independent of extraneous aid. But a really devotional building can injure no one, and profits thousands. And when you consider how many persons go to church, bringing with them the frivolities, the business, the cares, and the griefs of life, it is not a light matter that the very solemnity of the building, as they enter it, should awe or soothe them into a like solemnity, and put them at once into a spirit of prayer.”<sup>1</sup>

Elwin's assistance in this case was not confined to letters. He paid several visits to Norwich to advise the Building Committee of St. Peter Mancroft, and he also met Mr. Street when he came down to inspect the church. Street on this occasion arrived late, and apologising for the delay, excused himself by saying that two Americans had called on him the morning before to ask him to make a design for a church, which had to be prepared forthwith, as they were sailing the next day.

Elwin made a brief journey, in the summer of 1879, to see the windows of the Knights Templars' Church, at Temple Balsall, in Warwickshire, and to verify their precise measurements, that he might reproduce them exactly in the nave of Booton. His old zest in an excursion revived again then, as it had done on his cathedral tour. He was full of sprightly conversation, and unfatigued by a good deal of physical exertion. At intervals he paid similar visits to Lincoln and Southwell cathedrals, and

<sup>1</sup> To the Rev. S. Pelham, July 21, 1879.



other buildings that might help him in his work. Such breaks in his sedentary life were advantageous. When he returned home after going up to London on business in 1881, he reported a saying of someone he met, "that it was good for people to go out,—it rubbed off the rust." "Of course it does," Mrs. Elwin rejoined, "I know it rubs the rust off me. I came back from a day in Norwich ten years younger, and you have come back fifteen years younger from London. When you stay at home, I can literally see the rust coating over you, and when you go away I see the metal gleaming through on your return. Nobody rusts quicker than you do, and nobody polishes quicker." It was Elwin himself who recorded the observation, with the comment, "Such is the persistent creed of the most determined recluse in the three kingdoms."<sup>1</sup>

If the life rusted at home it was not from want of occupation. Elwin's generosity led people to invade its leisure by many requests, which fully took up any time that was to spare from his necessary duties. "Letters and quarrels multiply just now," he wrote to Miss Holley in his old, humorous strain, in December, 1881, "and it is the period when manuscripts commonly pour in upon me. Among the treasures which the post-bag brought me this morning was a novel, and the first instalment of a voyage round the world. The authors expect me to admire their writings and to find them a publisher. The traveller endeavours to prejudice me in his favour by speaking to me of the high opinions his friends have of him, and the novelist, more modest, gets his sister to send the MS., who pronounces on him the eulogy which he could not well bestow on himself."<sup>2</sup> If multitudinous little calls of this kind monopolised his

<sup>1</sup> Letter, Nov. 27, 1881.

<sup>2</sup> Dec. 10, 1881.

days, he did not complain. "As people muddle away money," he wrote in this same winter of 1881, "and have nothing to show for it, so it often happens with time. I should be puzzled now to give an account of my last week's occupation, and yet I was busy from morning to night. I might have said the same if I had spent the week in whistling, or twirling my finger and thumb, and I believe the result would have been nearly as great."<sup>1</sup> His wife told him he lived a "racketting life." "She laughed," said he, "most merrily at her own picture of it, and I laughed in concert, after which I read her, for a couple of hours, the *Memoirs of Barry Lyndon* (a masterpiece of satire on the Irish character, drawn with wonderful truth, and an exquisite delicacy of touch), which she enjoyed immensely, and we finished up the evening—it was midnight—with a long chat. And this is our usual 'racketting' way of passing the hours from six p.m. to twelve."

One or two personal characteristics fill up the picture of Elwin's home life at this period. He had great muscular strength, which at an earlier time had often been exerted on felling trees in his rectory grounds. He had always been a very rapid walker, unless engaged in conversation. It was the racing walk that only technically falls short of a run. He was once hurrying along Bond Street, when he was stopped by someone throwing his arms round him, and Lord Westmorland accosted him, saying, "This will never do: you will run over somebody and will be taken up for furious driving." It was at this pace that Elwin always took his exercise at home, usually accompanied by a dog. "There is one species of slavery," he wrote later, in 1896, "that has not been abolished in England, the slavery of human beings to pet animals—the dogs first, the rest

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Dec. 19, 1881.

leagues behind." At one time he had a dog who used to come under the window punctually at four o'clock in the afternoon, and bark for him to go out until he obeyed the summons. One Sunday afternoon he forcibly drew his master out. Elwin described the performance: "His impatience for a walk being extreme, and having tugged energetically at my arm with his paw to no purpose, he seized me a little above my wrist between his jaws, gave a sort of gulp to increase his hold, and softly nipping me with his teeth, tried with all his might to drag me from my chair. I thought it safest to obey."<sup>1</sup> Outside the house, the dog asserted himself as complacently as at the start. Not unfrequently he would settle the route, and often took his owner further than he wanted to go, simply because he was not ready to turn back himself.

Elwin was devoted to all animals, but was never master of their habits. In earlier days, when he used to visit the Zoological Gardens with a friend, he required sharp looking after to prevent his patting the fiercest beasts. "A cur came up to me," he wrote, in 1858, "as I was walking in the road, and without the least appearance of anger or impetuosity, quietly bit me in the leg. I thought the dog had come up with a friendly meaning, and I was stooping down to pat him, when, feeling his teeth deep in my flesh, I suddenly changed my amiable intentions, and kicked at him with all my might. I missed him, of course, and he trotted off, wagging his tail, apparently quite delighted at the feat he had performed. I understand that dogs of a mischievous disposition, and who are yet deficient in high spirit, often act in this treacherous manner."<sup>2</sup> If he saw a dog-fight he usually tried to

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, April 3, 1882.

<sup>2</sup> To Lady Westmorland, Nov. 24, 1858.



intervene by main strength, with the result that he was once bitten savagely by his own dog. He was emphatic in believing and explaining that it had bitten him by mistake. Soon after the dog fought again. "No one," he said, "was present except two helpless females and myself, who was under a supposed vow not to interfere." "Which of course you did," said his wife. "I can say with truth," Elwin remarked, "that I was not bitten, nor was either dog killed, though there was the usual bloodshed."<sup>1</sup>

He was entirely fearless. "On Monday," he wrote in 1882, "I met a horse running away, with broken traces and reins, the smashed carriage left behind at some place out of sight. I tried to stop the horse by seizing the rein, and with the result described in John Gilpin :

But not performing what I meant,  
And gladly would have done,  
The frightened steed I frightened more,  
And made him faster run.

I know, as a rule, it is useless to try and stop runaway horses in full career ; but impulse is quicker than reflection, and at the moment is irresistible. My spring at the outset proving a miss, I did not run far. It was too plain that I was beaten in the race." He was then sixty-six. It was perhaps as well that he missed the flying rein.

He abhorred all unkindness to the brute creation. In general he allowed no animals to be killed about his premises, and in the shooting season birds and hares used often to take refuge in the garden, with an apparent consciousness of security. One day, in his earlier years of impetuous action, Mrs. Elwin ran in to tell him that a boy was cruelly belabouring their donkey for amusement. "He was so busy at his wicked employment," said Elwin,

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, July 21, 1882.

in relating the incident, "that he did not hear me coming. I seized him by the collar, and snatching the stick from his hand, I thrashed him just as he had done the donkey. He yelled and jumped, and roared out, 'Oh! my back.' I told him that I was astonished to hear him complain, for that I was only treating him exactly as he had treated the poor animal. I did not spare him, you may be sure, for wanton cruelty makes my blood boil like a steam caldron. He can now appreciate the pleasure of being beaten, and I trust it will make him more merciful for the future."<sup>1</sup> Elwin's own mercies were in excess of any call of duty. The domestic pets made capital of his forbearance. Writing to a friend on a small piece of paper, he said, "The cat is ill (I believe from eating too many rabbits), and having got upon my lap, when I had only this scrap within my reach, I cannot disturb it by going for more."<sup>2</sup> He had a parrot, which was a favourite with him because it had belonged to his dear daughter Frances. It was fierce with everybody else, but was very fond of him, would perch on his bald head, kiss him all over, and usually shared his meals. One day it bit his finger severely at dinner. "The pudding," said Elwin, "was not to his mind, which enraged him, and, with the usual injustice of the world, he bit me instead of the cook." "Yesterday," he said in a following letter, "I wrote badly because the parrot had bitten my finger, and to-day because the cat is on my lap, and I have nothing on which to support my paper. I am the slave of the creatures over which man is said to have dominion, but I do not find it so."<sup>3</sup> The tyranny was habitual. "I have written this letter," he said, five years after, "holding my paper in my hand, as I sit before the fire, to accom-

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, 1859.

<sup>2</sup> Letter, July 11, 1876.

<sup>3</sup> Letter, Jan. 19, 1877.

moderate the junior cat who lies on my lap, and the parrot who is perched on my outstretched leg. I have to remain motionless, and the pain is getting almost as bad as a toothache. This, you will say, is carrying consideration for animals to excess, and I can only answer that, though I do it myself, I would not recommend it to anyone else.”<sup>1</sup> Sometimes the parrot flew out of the window, and there were serio-comic chases after it, and unavailing efforts to coax it back to its cage. At last it flew away and did not return, to its master’s real grief. For days and weeks he anxiously hoped for its reappearance.

In the middle of 1882 Whitwell Elwin was drawn aside from his usual home pursuits for a few weeks, by accepting a place on a committee chosen to report to the Norwich Diocesan Conference on some questions relating to the Diaconate. It was quite a novel subject to him. “I ought to read through the Fathers,” he wrote on Friday, July 7th, 1882,—“50 volumes, thick folio, on a moderate computation—in Greek and Latin, besides several folios of the proceedings of councils, etc., between this and Monday morning. Shall I accomplish it? Five minutes a folio is the most I shall be able to command, and shall have to digest as well as read in that time. I am tempted to give it up in despair.”

Now and then he was enticed into a visit to London. Although many of his old comrades had gone to rest, enough remained for his welcome to be warm. “I am in a whirl already,” he wrote, on one such occasion, in 1884, “and feel like a leaf in winter which the wind tosses about wildly. The poor withered leaf has no will in the matter, but is tossed up and down, and backwards and forwards, and round about, as the wind chooses.” It was wonderful how the surviving friends of his former years retained

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Feb. 6, 1882.



their affection for him, when he remained long out of sight. "Your friendship," wrote Sir A. H. Layard to him, in 1881, "is one of the few happy things in life that I have to look back to." And again, after a long silence, he wrote, January 2nd, 1888, "At the beginning of a new year one's thoughts naturally turn to one's old friends, and there is none to whom mine more readily turn than to you."

Of his own old friends John Murray had been the first, and he remained the longest, the chief, and the best. The whole of Elwin's literary life had been linked with him, and none had ever been warmer in personal affection. Murray was the very embodiment of good-heartedness, and Elwin had been its constant recipient. As a publisher, Murray had treated him with excessive generosity. As a friend he was for ever lavishing presents either on him or on some member of his family. There was no service he could do that he seemed to grudge, or rather that he did not do spontaneously so far as he was allowed, out of the fulness of his heart. "Your kindness," wrote Elwin, in acknowledging one of his many gifts, "is always too much, and we feel it as we ought,—feel it till our sense of it is almost a pain. . . . My heart says more than I can say with my pen."<sup>1</sup> "I never enjoyed a visit so much as the week I spent with you at Wimbledon," he said, on returning home, in 1865. "It was pleasant to that degree that I enjoy it still."<sup>2</sup> Nor was this a formal compliment. Elwin wrote to his wife, on a similar occasion, "I am just back from a cheery visit to Wimbledon. Everybody was so affectionate and good to me that it was very touching. Murray and his friends treat me as if I were an archbishop."<sup>3</sup> In 1884, Murray wanted

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Nov. 2, 1870.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Nov. 4, 1865.

<sup>3</sup> To Mrs. Elwin, Nov. 25, 1881.

him to be his guest on a trip to Italy, and was so earnest in wishing him to go that he got Sir Henry Layard, who had a house at Venice, to add his voice in urging acceptance of the offer.<sup>1</sup> "I need not say," Whitwell Elwin wrote to Murray in reply, "how much we were touched by the enormous kindness of your letter,—the last of a long, long line of exuberant acts of friendship. . . . I must relinquish the scheme with its manifold delights. It is forbidden fruit to me. But the greatest pleasure of all I retain,—a pleasure far beyond all the sights of Europe,—that which I derive from my glowing sense of your kindness, and which warms me more than the suns of Italy. It is an exquisite delight to me, I can assure you, my inestimable old friend. There are occasions when it is fitting to say these things, and this is one of them. I wish you could know, in the retrospect of my life, how rich is that part of it which relates to you and your family,—a debt never to be paid. I am glad it cannot be. I prefer to have the consciousness of it."<sup>2</sup> The mutual interest and love remained intact till Murray's death in 1892. Writing to him, December 10th, 1888, Elwin explained how rarely he now moved from home, and added, "The old friends are none the less our constant companions, the subject of our daily talk, and an increasing delight to us. Of the whole number there is not one that we value more than yourself, or of whom we have richer or more grateful memories."

Murray greatly relied on Elwin's literary insight for opinions on works offered him for publication. More than once he brought out a book which proved successful, rather against his own judgment, in deference to his friend's recommendation. At other times he published

<sup>1</sup> Sir A. H. Layard to Elwin, 1883 and 1884.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, April 10, 1884.

what could not be remunerative, because Elwin thought the contents valuable, and sometimes also, it is to be feared, out of kindness to Elwin himself, who had introduced the writer. On the other hand, he was also often saved from accepting indifferent works by the ex-editor's penetrating criticisms. He was not an ungenerous critic, but he had clear perceptions of what a book should be, and always expressed his views unreservedly when his opinion was asked. Thus, he wrote of a manuscript that was submitted to him: "The book will fall dead from the poverty of its matter, from its dullness and its feebleness." Of a poem written by a Member of Parliament, whose name Murray withheld, he said, "Of all the verse I ever read, this, I think, has the least pretension to the name of poetry. The thoughts are obscure, the sentences intricate, the metre is halting and unmusical, the language is overstrained and yet without force, and the general vein is dull and lifeless. I would at least advise him to suspend its publication till his M.P. life has terminated, or he will damage his position in the House of Commons, and perhaps lose his seat at the next election. He should read Shakespeare's Julius Cæsar, and take warning by Cinna, who was torn to pieces by the mob for his bad verses. They are utterly worthless, without any beauty or power, and it would not alter my opinion if it turned out that they were produced by the united wisdom of the Cabinet." "I fear," he wrote of a certain proposed Memoir, "there is an insuperable obstacle to any substantial improvement, for the biographer is unequal to his task. It is useless to specify defects in detail when the author is evidently incapable of remedying them." Of another writer he said, "He has very little to tell the world except his own feeble guesses, which are not worth the paper on which they are written." But he would



constantly see hidden merit behind unskilful workmanship, and would show how some recasting would remedy defects. He was never for sparing trouble in revision. In reference to some ill-arranged biographical papers, he wrote to the publisher, "I would not, in your place, encourage idleness in authors. I would make the editor do his part, and unless he did I would dismiss his production. Everybody is injured by hasty, undigested biographies,—the publisher, the public, the author, and the hero." He was of opinion that nearly all modern books, especially Lives, were too long, from want of painstaking digestion of materials. But authors, as a rule, being loth to part with their words, or to bestow on them the hard labour of reducing them to orderly shape, he was not always successful in gaining an ear to his counsels upon abbreviation and condensation of matter.

One friendship was renewed in this later period of Elwin's life, and became a considerable feature in it for his remaining years. When Lord Lytton, the novelist, was still alive, Elwin had become acquainted with his son, who, however, was living chiefly abroad, in embassy appointments. He had then gone out to India as Viceroy, and it was not till his return to England, in 1880, that he and Elwin became intimate. Each now stayed frequently with the other. "It seems shocking," Elwin wrote from Knebworth, January 5th, 1884, "after I had retired so many years from big-house life, that I should once more be visiting." One thing led to another, and from Knebworth he was drawn on once or twice to Hatfield, where he was enchanted both with the house and its occupants. He had known Lord Salisbury well in early days, when he had enlisted him, as Lord Robert Cecil—a young and hitherto unknown genius—as a writer for the Quarterly. He always continued to admire the ability which he had

detected before it had attracted public notice, and was a fervent believer in the Prime Minister's statesmanship to the end of his days.

Lord Lytton's affection for Elwin became as great as that of any friend he ever had. "You cannot love our dear Elwin," he wrote to one of his daughters, in 1884, "more than I do, and neither of us can love him too much,—no, nor even enough." He used to enjoy staying at Booton. After he had been there for the first time, he wrote, July 14th, 1883: "My visit to Elwin was in all ways delightful. It was like a visit to Dr. Primrose.<sup>1</sup> But in the domestic beauty of the vicar's house, and the evidences surrounding it of the lovable and wise beneficence of his character, the vicarage of Booton far exceeds that of Wakefield. Mrs. Elwin is one of those charming types of character never found out of England, and rarely in England,—a homely gentlewoman in a lace cap, surprisingly cultivated in mind, yet a thorough *haus frau*." Of Elwin he wrote soon after, "His is, I think, one of those natures which are lovable because there is in them a great capacity of loving."<sup>2</sup> The warmth of his affectionate nature was kindled by the geniality of Lord Lytton, and he became as fond of him as of any of his best friends of earlier years.

The friendship had its literary side, not only in common sympathies as to past authors, but in co-operation of present work. In 1883, Lord Lytton was engaged on a Life of his father. He consulted Elwin much about it, submitting what he wrote to him, and adopting many of his opinions on the novelist. Elwin, on his part, gave his mind to assisting Lord Lytton, after his usual custom,

<sup>1</sup> Lord Lytton did not at this time know that Thackeray had designated him by this title.

<sup>2</sup> The Earl of Lytton to Mrs. Elwin, Nov. 27, 1883.

as unreservedly as if it had been his own work. He wrote a short criticism on the novel entitled "The Disowned," which Lord Lytton thought so "consummate" that he said, "I feel that it will now be impossible for me to rewrite the chapter without writing into it your wonderful letter about it, which condenses into a single sheet of notepaper an elaborate and exhaustive analysis of the book, and contains all that can be said about it."<sup>1</sup> He did, in fact, incorporate it almost word for word.<sup>2</sup> When the book was published, Elwin would allow no allusion to be made in the preface as to his help, but Lord Lytton wrote to him privately in generous terms. "It is an obligation too intense for acknowledgment in any conventional form, and I do feel that any half acknowledgment is worse than none. It would be, not a statement of your gift or of my gratitude, but a misstatement of both, cheapening only what is priceless."<sup>3</sup>

Shortly after, Lord Lytton wrote the poem which he named *Glenaveril*. A good deal of it was composed at Booton, slight reminiscences of which tinge it here and there. He was an exquisite reader of verse, and sometimes read his manuscript of *Glenaveril* over the fire at Booton in the evening after dinner. Mrs. Elwin's enjoyment of it pleased him so much that he gracefully inscribed a presentation copy to her, as "*Glenaveril's* patroness." Elwin was not so good a listener as his wife to other people's reading. As he sat on one side of the fireplace, with Lord Lytton opposite to him on the other, he would betray that his mind had wandered by an occasional snore, which Lord Lytton only recognised by the suspicion of a smile. Writing to one of his daughters, he said, "I feel

<sup>1</sup> The Earl of Lytton to Elwin, Aug. 25, 1883.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton*, vol. ii. pp. 205-10.

<sup>3</sup> The Earl of Lytton to Elwin, Oct. 23, 1883.



quite sure he thinks well of it, although every time I read it, it has the effect of sending him fast to sleep. On Monday night both my host and hostess were so flatteringly urgent to hear the new fifth canto that I read this out. Dear E., who had been warm in the expression of his wish to hear it, slept through it sweetly, but Mrs. E., who listened intently, was enthusiastic about it. Then on Sunday night they both asked to have the whole of the first four books read over again, E. saying that he should take it in better the second time than he could the first. I re-read the first canto, with renewed approval from Mrs. E., and renewed slumber from E.”<sup>1</sup>

If he had not listened to it well, he did it the service of reviewing it cordially, in the *Quarterly Review* for July, 1885. He followed the same method as in his earlier reviews of books, taking the materials of the poem and working them up into a narrative of Glenaveril, told in prose. It was the last paper that he ever contributed to the *Review*.

The reciprocal visits between Booton and Knebworth were interrupted, in 1887, by Lord Lytton's appointment as Ambassador at Paris. The attachment, however, subsisted on both sides till his death in 1891, and continued undiminished between Elwin and Lord Lytton's family up to the time of his own death, nine years later.

One other literary task, the last that appeared in print, came again to his hand without his seeking it, in 1888. John Forster's library had then been finally lodged at South Kensington Museum, and Elwin was asked to write a biographical sketch of the donor, to be prefixed to the Catalogue. He gladly consented, in affection for his old genial friend, though it was not very easy to do. "All the extraneous materials I had for it," he told Lord Lytton,

<sup>1</sup> Letter of the Earl of Lytton, Oct., 1884.

"were a few dates and two or three short extracts, the whole not covering one side of a sheet of notepaper. The poverty of information made me shrink from the undertaking, and I could not bring myself to attempt it till the book was printed, and waiting for the prefatory pages."<sup>1</sup> Lord Lytton thought he had done it admirably. "I have read your sketch of Forster," he said, "with surprise and delight. It has always seemed to me that a biographical silhouette of this kind must be much more difficult than a full biography. I think you have succeeded wonderfully in producing a very lifelike, very pleasant, and generally effective portrait of the real man."<sup>2</sup>

Thus the years sped quietly on. "My life gets fuller, the older I grow," Elwin wrote to Murray, in 1888, "though the circumstances which fill it are small and local." He often said that he was busy in "little nothings." Yet he was doing much more than he supposed. Not only was he ministering to his parishioners, but his fine church was gradually taking shape and developing its beauties. More than this, he was always engaged in training the life of some individual with peculiar assiduity. He would devote large periods, not only of days and weeks, but months and even years, to a single person, in order to form a character, and would be unstinting in the letters and advice he would give to attain this end. Most men scatter their "bread upon the waters," hoping "to find it after many days." Elwin, on the contrary, plied his beneficent aid with an affectionate persistence until he saw the fruit which he had fostered ripen on the branches. Probably few guides of personal life could count so many people whose lives they had shaped into permanent productiveness. His friends sometimes mur-

<sup>1</sup> To the Earl of Lytton, Feb. 17, 1888.

<sup>2</sup> The Earl of Lytton to Elwin, Feb., 1888.

mured at the amount of time he would bestow on one person, to the detriment of what they considered would be a higher pursuit. He thought differently. If an opportunity presented itself for cultivating the nature of an individual, he considered that the work was what fell in his path, and that it was what he was intended to do.

One who had experience of this fostering care wrote of him, "His wisdom as a counsellor was very great, and in trying to analyse the peculiar type of it, I think I should say it consisted in this, that he made you very clearly understand your own mind on a point requiring action, and enabled you to see to which side your own judgment would, in the long run, lean ; and it is this, really, which each man in a difficulty wants to know, and cannot always at a crisis see for himself. Theoretically he had a low opinion of human nature. He would generalise about the sinfulness of man till one wondered whether even the best of men were not whited sepulchres ; but, side by side with this, his capacity for idealising individuals was excessive. His friendships were ardent, comprehensive, uncritical, and very numerous. His genius lay pre-eminently in an unparalleled power of sympathy and large-hearted humanity. His 'wisdom and understanding' were 'exceeding much,' because of his 'largeness of heart.'"

His counsel was readily granted to all kinds of persons, young and old, but, in its most fervent form, to the young. "He had little sympathy," wrote the same friend, "with new thoughts in literature and art, but youth in human beings had for him a never-ending charm. He loved little children, but was not quite comfortable with them, and did not easily understand them ; but young men and maidens found in him an unfailing ally against any older authority, or against any hampering custom and conventional restriction." It was this attraction to youth which



saved his own eighteenth-century modes of thought from making him antiquated. "Elderly men," he wrote in a commonplace-book, "exclaim against the rising generation, and youth despise their elders. This is the natural effect of the difference of age. The elders have become staid, lovers of quiet, and fixed in their habits; the young, active, adventurous, rash, restless, and lovers of change. The old like to exercise authority, the young consider the old to be bigoted, obsolete, and incapable. As the young believe that they have made fresh advances into the regions of truth, and that their elders are the slaves of old-fashioned error, the rising generation has its own creed in religion, in politics, and in literature. This antagonism in the notions of the young and old is of great advantage to mankind. Though the young are in many respects rash and shallow, their passion for novelty, and their power of striking out fresh ideas, is the cause that the world is perpetually progressing. The caution, the inertness, and the experience of their elders is a check upon the over-sanguine projects and crude opinions of the young, and subjects their schemes and ideas to a searching criticism. If all were old, the world would stand still; if all were young, it would be turned topsy-turvy."

In dealing with the young, his assistance went much beyond helping them to solve some immediate problem of life. It was largely educational. The great object with them, he felt, was, as he often expressed it, to form their minds. For this end he was very emphatic that they must have some "main pursuit." "There should always," he said, "be a central study, which should be, as it were, the trunk of the tree, and we may then have many subsidiary branches." "A main pursuit," he said again, "is of immense importance, not only as a source of perpetual interest, but because it is only when we go below

the surface of subjects that we are obliged to think and study sufficiently to cause our minds to be opened and strengthened." He considered the particular pursuit of much less consequence than the fact of having something definite. "Any topic," he would say, "will serve." "The great thing is to discover what suits your taste, for if the kind be wholesome, knowledge, like food, does most good when it is devoured with an appetite."<sup>1</sup> But, important as the secular pursuit might be for the training of the mind, he never made this the ultimate goal. It was in the higher region of spiritual realities, of which no record remains except in the lives of his friends, that he expended his most strenuous and fruitful exertions.

<sup>1</sup> Letters and Commonplace-Book.

## CHAPTER XV

1889-1900

ESSAYS ON COWPER AND THACKERAY—PRIVATE READING AND OPINIONS—HIS WIFE'S ILLNESS AND DEATH—LAST YEARS AND DEATH.

THE concluding years of Elwin's life were spent almost exclusively in the quiet seclusion of Booton Rectory. Now and then he would go away for a day or a single night, but even this only rarely. For the most part he and Mrs. Elwin were alone. The avocations of their sons and grandchildren made visits from them but occasional, and as old friends died guests became less numerous. Miss Holley, who now resided in the parish, was usually a daily companion for some part of the afternoon. In the evening he read: in the morning he was either occupied on his church-building, or engaged in writing or correspondence. This last, however, diminished as time went on, when one after another of his former associates passed away. When letters became fewer, he grew more methodical, and even punctilious, in answering them. As the hurry of over-pressure disappeared from his life, his own habits too somewhat altered, and he ended by being rather precise and tidy in the ordering of his personal belongings. His comparative leisure would now have given him the opportunity to use his pen on a permanent literary work, if he had been disposed to



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WHITWELL ELWIN AT WORK IN LATER LIFE.

A PENCIL SKETCH.

undertake it; but, as a matter of fact, he wrote comparatively little, and that little perhaps without much idea of really putting it in print.

From time to time, the old project of republishing some of his Quarterly essays was revived by Murray, and, after his death, by his son and successor. He would not, however, consent to a mere reprint without giving them the benefit of his riper knowledge and judgment. The idea of revising them was never quite abandoned, and at periods it was commenced, but never continued very far. Cowper had always been a favourite subject with him, and he took the article he had written on him in hand. The revision soon expanded into an entire rewriting of the original paper on the scale of a regular biography. Several times he made progress with the first part of the life, but was always checked either by want of some information, or by being seduced into distant by-paths of narrative and criticism, or by the difficulty of picking up the thread of his work after an interruption, or by a dissatisfaction with what he had done. Consequently, though he left two versions of the early pages fairly complete, and much material for the rest, the work never approximated a termination at his own hands, and never would have been finished however long he had lived.

Alternating with Cowper, Elwin made similar fitful attempts to write a Life of Thackeray. This grew out of a suggestion, made by his family, that he should jot down his recollections of him on paper. The fragmentary plan developed into a scheme for a full biography. He had few materials other than those open to the world at large, but he conceived that, with the aid of his own personal knowledge of the novelist, he could make him tell his own story out of his novels. From a congenial recreation the design gradually shaped itself into a duty which he fancied



that he owed to his old friend. He reflected that Thackeray had been much misunderstood, that those who could describe him truly were all disappearing, and that perhaps he was the only person left who had known him closely enough to describe him faithfully. It happened with this memoir exactly as with that upon Cowper. Many versions were begun, broken off, and recommenced. The furthest point he ever reached stopped short of the time when Thackeray definitely adopted literature as a profession, and much short of the period when he was acquainted with him himself. The fragment is an interesting sketch of Thackeray's early years, but none of it is written in the strong, nervous vein of his best compositions.

Some disappointment may reasonably be felt that he kept on relabouring the introductory pages of these two biographies, when an equal amount of work would have amply completed both if he would only have gone forwards. The bent of his mind, however, made this impossible. All his best literary work had been done under pressure, and in no other way could it be extorted from him. He was too fastidious about style voluntarily to leave his composition until he had smoothed out of it the slight ruggedness which gave it its sparkle. He was too anxious to make everything clear to be willing to allow any margin for the intellectual discovery of the reader, if he was permitted to amplify what he wrote by full explanations. And he had too great a love for minute completeness to resist the temptation to pursue subsidiary points, which he was wont to follow out in detail until he lost the main track of his theme. Hence the brilliancy of his writing diminished with the leisure which he was able to apply to it. What little he did, from time to time, to his old essays in the way of correction and addition was, indeed, for the most part to their gain, but any regret

that may be entertained at his not having himself superintended their reprint may be tempered by the knowledge that the profit they might have received from a completer revision would have been more than counterbalanced by the loss of qualities in which their highest excellence consists.

While living the life of a recluse in these latter days, Elwin by no means lost his interest in the doings of the outside world. He was a diligent student of the daily newspaper, and even liked to have two or three different papers, which he read carefully, often for some hours in the evening. He kept himself abreast of every topic of the hour; and, storing up what he read in his wonderful memory, he had an astonishing knowledge of the circumstances that brought about events. If any complication arose in foreign affairs, he could always recollect the incidents which had led up to it in past years, and could explain its bearings with precise lucidity. His early predilection for the law, and his intimacy with leading men in the profession, made him follow an important case with extreme zest, and he formed as clear opinions on the drift of the evidence as if he had held the office of the judge. What was more surprising was his acquaintance with lesser details of news, on subjects which seemed to lie altogether outside the range of his own concerns. He was versed in new plays produced at the theatres, would follow a billiard tournament with as much eagerness for the success of a champion player as if he had had a stake on the result, knew all about racehorses and their owners and jockeys, and was familiar with most of the other similar items which make up the columns of the public prints. These lesser topics occupied no particular place in his thoughts, and he did not talk about them, unless an accidental turn in the

conversation gave occasion for some remark which showed the extent and minuteness of his knowledge of facts.

Apart from the newspaper, his own private reading was for the most part drawn from the past. "I read and think a good deal," he had written in 1878, "or, more properly, I may say, like the Frenchman who was asked whether he read, 'No, I *re-read*.'" <sup>1</sup> Even in re-reading, his tastes had become limited. The editing of Pope seemed to have given him a dislike to some of the literature which once had fascinated him. Latterly he cared very little for poetry, except Shakespeare and, perhaps, Milton. For modern poems he cared scarcely at all. At one late period he read Tennyson industriously, and with some appreciation, but it was only a passing humour, and excited no enthusiasm. He was interested in Lord Lytton's poems, but this was more from personal friendship than from any abstract liking for poetry itself.

At no time had contemporary productions attracted him much, and least of all as his own years advanced. "I belong myself," he said in 1888, "to the past, and read books for their excellence chiefly. When new books come in my way, which is seldom, I usually read them, but do not go in search of them." <sup>2</sup> He had rather a contempt for them, as a rule, thinking the literature of his own period to be at a low ebb in its quality. Writing, in his more caustic days, to Miss Holley, who had consulted him as to what she should read, he said, "Let it be wine that you drink, and not the coloured water which it is the fashion to turn out in the present day. I warn you against this, because the majority of readers are for nothing except new publications, which are too rickety to grow old. They are in general the premature fruit

<sup>1</sup> To Dr. William Smith, Dec. 2, 1878.

<sup>2</sup> To Murray, Dec. 10, 1888.



of a miserable stock, gathered green, hurried to market, soon rotten, and never ripe."<sup>1</sup> This may have been a just criticism, but, even if the average of the books had been better, it may be doubted whether they would have suited his own eighteenth-century turn of thought.

A friend who knew his tastes during the last period of his life writes of him :

"Intellectually one had an abiding sense that he was not of our day. His literary sympathies seemed not to extend beyond the first quarter of the century. For Scott he had a very just and full appreciation, knew his works intimately, and delighted in them, and of all his novels he thought in later days that *Guy Mannering* was his favourite. He had a great admiration for Bulwer Lytton as a man and writer, but attributed to him distinguished talent rather than genius. Dickens and Thackeray he knew personally, and the latter he loved, which personal affection I always thought in some degree accounted for his liking for his books. George Eliot he could not read. No poet after the great group of 'the pond poets' really affected him. He had read Tennyson, but had a very small admiration for him, and Browning he could not read. Matthew Arnold, Swinburne, Rossetti, were to him mere names,—men of no account. His knowledge of Shakespeare was profound, and his love and appreciation of him immense, but it was not exactly a modern appreciation. Of contemporary French or German literature, I think he knew little, and read less. Of Goethe he used to say that he had only written one supremely great thing, and that was the first part of *Faust*, but I do not think he knew even that well, or cared for it much. I never heard him speak of any modern French novel, except *George Sand's*

<sup>1</sup> To Miss Holley, Oct. 28, 1850.

Consuelo, which he read to please me, and admired greatly. Old French literature he knew and admired much more, and Montaigne was one of his favourite authors.

"In art, too, he had so little sympathy with the modern pre-Raphaelite school that, whereas they claimed to have brought back a spirit of beauty after the dead material prosaicalness of early Victorian art, he used to declare that they worshipped ugliness! His artistic as well as his literary appreciations were chiefly those of the eighteenth century, and the geniuses that had lived before that age, and had been appreciated by it. His attitude towards science was, in the same way, much what might have been expected from Dr. Johnson. Owen he had known personally, and had a great liking for; but Darwin he used to speak of as a man who had worked out no theory, but merely put forward a wild hypothesis, which was now discredited in the eyes of the ablest members of the scientific world. Huxley and Tyndall he cheerfully placed in a very back row for ability. Kelvin and Rayleigh he recognised as profound in their line, and worthy of all respect.

"He was not a student of history, but of literature. History, apart from the great individualities which have helped to make it, was not, I believe, very interesting to him. He had a strong sympathy with Sir Robert Walpole's exclamation, 'Read me anything but history: that must be false.'<sup>1</sup> The past he loved as a student, the present and future he felt a calm hope for as a Christian;

<sup>1</sup> "I am sometimes tempted to be of Sir Robert Walpole's opinion of history when I find statements made by honourable individuals who were close to the alleged circumstances, without one word of truth in the entire narrative. There must be thousands of assertions which are now received with unhesitating confidence, merely because the persons to whom they relate had no opportunity to deny them."—To Lord Brougham, June 9, 1856.

but he did not set himself to study the past with a view to its illuminating the problems of the present, and it was character, not events, that most profoundly interested him."

Even new ways of putting old truths did not recommend themselves to Elwin's mind. He always maintained that Paley had answered every objection that could be urged against the evidences of Christianity, and that no new setting of his arguments was required to meet modern phases of opinion. Advanced schools of critical speculation he abhorred, especially on sacred subjects, and most of all when they ventured to assault the Bible. The so-called "higher" criticism, though it was coming much into vogue in the later years of his life, did not trouble him. He simply dismissed it with scorn, feeling confident that its day would be short, and that it contained the seeds of its own destruction. When some books of the Old Testament were printed with coloured backgrounds to the letter-press, in order to indicate to the eye the sections allotted to different authors, he was amused, and wrote, "The worst enemy of the high critics could not have hit upon a scheme for expressing their childish conceit more conclusive than their own harlequin Bible."<sup>1</sup> He was pleased, however, to see the critics answered, and among the few modern theological books he relished was Bishop Ellicott's rejoinder to them in his little work entitled *Christus Comprobator*. A few years before he had also greatly enjoyed and commended Professor Salmon's *Introduction to the New Testament*, which Murray had shown him in manuscript, largely on account of the racy common sense with which he disposed of attacks on the authenticity of the Books. He valued Dr. Pusey's *Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, very

<sup>1</sup> To his son, April 20, 1898.



much because its tone was so entirely alien to the free, critical spirit of the young adventurers' school, partly also because it was a real exposition of the Bible, the kind of divinity that he principally cared for.

He had no patience with any new-fangled theories that touched religion. From first to last he always regarded popular Darwinism as practically synonymous with infidelity, though once, when he was pressed as to whether he thought it incompatible with the thought of God as the Creator, he admitted that he did not consider that it was. On the whole, he regarded it more in the light of a wild and foolish piece of imagination. He very little changed the opinion that he had formed on it when Murray sent him the proof-sheets of Darwin's *Descent of Man* in 1870. He then wrote: "Hitherto Darwin has maintained the general thesis that species are not created, but that one is evolved from another. He did not attempt to trace the genealogy of any particular animal. Now he descends from generalities to an example, and undertakes to prove the descent of man from the beasts. A difficulty meets him here, and at every part of his case. According to his theory, there must have been myriads of intermediate links, and they have totally disappeared without leaving a trace behind. All the efforts to explain the extirpation of the transition creatures are inadequate, and indeed impotent. In his new book he assumes that this difficulty has been got over in his former works. But a tremendous difficulty remains. In the process from beast-hood to man-hood, man has acquired a number of new peculiarities, and lost many old ones. How did he come to lose the old and acquire the new? The fragment you have sent me relates chiefly to the loss of the old peculiarities, and the sum of his argument is as follows: Man had once a tail; he had pointed ears which he could move

backwards and forwards; he had a skin which he could work up and down, as he still moves the skin on his forehead; and he was covered with hair. All that Darwin can say to explain the loss of these characteristics is that they vanished because they ceased to be useful. It might be intelligible that a man's tail should waste away when he had no longer occasion to wag it,—though I should have thought that savages would still have found it useful in tropical climates to brush away insects; but why should he lose his hair, which is a passive thing, not kept vigorous by voluntary movement; and why, again, should the hair drop from one portion of his face, and remain on another portion, in the shape of whiskers, beard, and moustache? And this is especially noticeable because the space in animals from the nose to the mouth is smooth, with only a few scattered bristles. Without any assignable cause, man has been losing hair where animals retain it, and growing hair where animals never had it. So again with the ears. Man might cease to move them backwards and forwards in the intermediate stage between beast-hood and man-hood, because he had no longer occasion to listen so eagerly as before; but what should cause the ears to change their shape, to grow round instead of pointed, to alter their convolutions, etc.? Darwin has not the ghost of an explanation to offer.

“His attempt, therefore, to show that man may have lost his old animal peculiarities is a total failure. The positive proofs that he once had them are, if possible, still more ludicrous. All ears, any more than all legs, are not formed exactly alike, and some men have an outline which bulges out slightly at some portion of the curvature. This, says Darwin, is the remains of an animal ear. He has known a man or two who can move his ears, and this is the remnant of the action we observe in horses and

donkeys. Some people can move the scalp of the head, and this is the old animal power of shrugging the skin. Now, I believe that a long catalogue of these little eccentricities of make and movement may be drawn up, and that it will be found that the majority of them are functions not shared by animals at all,—that they are mere individual idiosyncrasies. But, apart from this argument, I will ask why, if the useless power of moving the scalp and ears, and the useless minute inequalities of curvature, have subsisted until now, there should not be some short- or even long-tailed men?—the tail, from its utility in swishing away insects in hot climates, being the last of the obsolete organs which was likely to have disappeared. I should not even despair of finding some properly pointed ears, especially among the Darwinian naturalists. The Darwinians talk of themselves as comprising all the eminent naturalists of Europe, and, encouraged by mutual applause, they will blow their bubble till it bursts from its own weakness. When a really eminent naturalist appears, I expect that the theory of the descent of man from the beasts will disappear.”<sup>1</sup> “Never,” he wrote again, much later, “was a vast hypothesis based upon such a mass of pure assumptions and such insignificant facts. That it has many disciples is only a proof to me that the followers are themselves a feeble race.” The direct antithesis it suggested to his mind was, “More than ever (if that were possible) I believe, upon sure, unanswerable evidence, that the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth, and that the Bible contains His revelation to man.”<sup>2</sup>

During the last epoch of Elwin’s life he sometimes came into contact, among his acquaintances, with the sceptical doubts which had become fashionable in educated society. There was scarcely anything that struck a less responsive

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, Sept. 21, 1870.

<sup>2</sup> The same, Nov. 10, 1885.



chord in his own mind. "Scepticism," he once wrote to Murray, "is essentially shallow, as everything must be which opposes the schemes of the Almighty."<sup>1</sup> He did not even believe in its reality with most people. "There are more pretended infidels," he would say, "than real ones." "Young people, to whom death is no more a reality than if they were born immortal, affect unbelief, because they think it indicates penetration and superiority to prejudice. When they grow older, and begin to feel how soon life will pass away, they are driven to reflect upon those subjects on which before they talked without reflection, and an affected scepticism is exchanged for a real belief."<sup>2</sup> If it was not affectation, he considered that it arose from moral obliquity. "Those who look only on fleshly things are blind to the spiritual, with all its beauties and sublimities, and mistake the darkness in their own minds for a blank in the universe. No matter what may be a man's gifts, if he only looks down upon earth, he will not see into the heavens."<sup>3</sup>

His own unsympathetic attitude towards scepticism did not, however, prevent his applying himself sympathetically to remove the doubts of others. In private conversation he would devote his most earnest efforts to combat them, working out evidential proofs with great patience, and generally succeeding in removing the difficulties. He usually led people directly to Holy Scripture for their proofs. "The difficulty vanished," he said of a cultured man, "when he took the divine truths straight from the Bible itself, instead of looking at them through the jarring influences which sometimes enveloped them in the talk and practice of fallible men." "Fervent in all things," writes one of his intimate friends, "he was fervently

<sup>1</sup> To Murray, May 2, 1866.

<sup>2</sup> Commonplace-Book.

<sup>3</sup> To Miss Holley, June, 1879.

religious, and side by side with the heat of feeling he had also a wonderful spiritual serenity, the serenity of abiding and immovable faith, and of an ever-present consciousness of the spiritual background to all earthly things. But he showed an absolutely untiring patience in discussing any religious or spiritual question, if the object of the discussion was to arrive at conviction, though controversy for its own sake had no charm for him. He enormously enjoyed to find a kindred thought or feeling on any great subject in his companion. Antagonism of thought, on the other hand, was disagreeable to him, and far from acting as a stimulus, it suppressed and silenced him."

The only exception to his silence under such circumstances was when someone made an open sceptical observation in company. Shy as he was by nature, and averse as he was to public debate on religion, he made it an absolute rule to himself never to let such remarks pass unchallenged. A friend having delivered himself of a philippic, during the "Essays and Reviews" controversy, against stringent opinions of Scripture, at a dinner-party in 1861, wound up by begging no one to reply, because he felt too strongly about it to be able to keep his temper. When he stopped for breath, Elwin began an expostulation. "My dear Elwin," said his friend, "I would rather not hear a word on the matter." "But you *shall* hear," Elwin cried. "Without any provocation you have stated your views with great violence, and upon such a topic I cannot allow them to pass unanswered."

Holy Scripture, indeed, became increasingly the basis of his spiritual teaching. A Bible always lay on his working table, and towards the end of the week he was sure to be seen evolving the subjects of his Sunday sermons from it, generally without the assistance of any other books. He

had thought much and deeply on religious matters, from very early days, so that he always had abundance of well-considered materials. In the busy Quarterly Review period, he often made no special preparation at all, and selected his subject and his text as he was reading the lessons, but in his later life he devoted a good deal of consideration to his preaching.

The impossibility of making a daily use of the church while it was gradually rebuilding, coupled with his own attacks of poorliness, had broken in upon the regularity of the daily services which he had instituted some years before. At times, however, he revived them, and at one period towards the end of his life he had probably the earliest Evensong of any church in England,—at 2 p.m., before the midday rectory meal. He placed it then because he found the afternoon too much interrupted for the fixture of any later hour. Subsequently he had to be content with his two Sunday services, at eleven and three, and a monthly Eucharist in the middle of the day.

In Church matters, while he had shaken off all his old intolerance of advanced opinions, he never became exactly a high churchman—still less a ritualist. Towards ritual he felt indifference, which easily turned almost to irritation if it was made a matter of principle, or of serious conflict with authority. Of one credited with ritual proclivities, he remarked drily that it would be a good thing if he would give more attention to his dress outside church and less attention to it inside. In the same old vein of humour, when some question was addressed to him as to whether a certain high churchman had travelled abroad, he replied, "Yes; he has been to Africa, and a good bit of the way to Rome." Such light touches expressed exactly the later attitude of his mind towards externals, which he



neither condemned nor approved, but to which he refused either way to attach grave importance. As to the inner realities underlying externals, the inclination of his thoughts was towards stronger sacramental doctrines than he had formerly held. Referring to a religious conversation in 1884, he said, "We read the sixth chapter of St. John, and tried to penetrate to its inner meaning. I never myself saw so clearly the end and effect of the Blessed Sacrament, and what a security it was for our inward unity with the Redeemer, and perseverance in the heavenly life."<sup>1</sup> He was much impressed with the dissertation on the Eucharist by William Law, the non-juror, and cordially recommended his writings on the subject to the study of younger clergy.

In 1894 Mr. John Murray, the son and successor of his old friend, invited Elwin to a dinner given to inaugurate the installation of Mr. Rowland Prothero as editor of the *Quarterly Review*. Elwin replied, "The temptation is great. But what Bentley, the scholar, said of himself is true of me: I am like an old portmanteau which holds together when it is let alone, and falls to pieces in travelling. I am so used to the settled habits of home that I never pay a visit without being ill after it, and have ceased to go anywhere, in consequence. I did hesitate a good bit after the receipt of your letter, and it is only from the certainty that my desire to be of your party would not avert the consequences, that I regretfully give up the idea. I suppose I should not have had an acquaintance among your guests, and it would have been a pleasure to see the new world and compare it with the old—with Lockhart, Croker, and the rest. I am glad you had such a capital editor at hand, and I am sure there is as much reason to congratulate him on his connection with Albe-

<sup>1</sup> Letter, Jan. 9, 1884.

marle Street as to congratulate you on having filled up the gap so happily.”<sup>1</sup>

Elwin's occupations were now, indeed, almost exclusively parochial. His eldest brother, Hastings, who owned the Booton estate, was still alive; but, having no house in the parish, he had always been non-resident, and latterly handed over to Whitwell the management of his property. This laid on him the duties of squire as well as those of rector. In 1896 he added to his other benefits to the village the raising of a voluntary school, so as to obviate the necessity for the children to attend a board school in a neighbouring parish. He planned and superintended the erection of school buildings himself, as he had done with the church, as well as with some houses put up in his time in Booton. When the school was opened, in 1897, he expected to take some part in the teaching. He soon, however, found that the modern system of instruction was much too mechanical for his ideas, and that he could not graft his own conceptions of mental culture upon it. None the less the school was a great pleasure to him. He had always liked children, and taken delight in anything that would make them happy. He had swings put up for them in the playground, where he would often be found himself, encouraging them to swing to a height that was perilous to their necks. The highest flyers were generally rewarded by a coin from his purse; but, in order to avoid exciting jealousy, he always endeavoured to convey the gift secretly. His manner of doing this was characteristic of the naive simplicity which had made Thackeray call him Dr. Primrose. He would partly turn aside from the children, and with some deliberation search in his purse for the suitable prize, would then beckon a girl out of the group,

<sup>1</sup> To Mr. John Murray, Feb. 26, 1894.

and with elaborate surreptitiousness would convey the piece of money into her hand, while the rest were intently looking on. He, however, had a fond imagination that nobody but the recipient was aware of the transaction.

In this quiet round of home and parish life the years moved on till the winter of 1896, when both he and his wife had a severe attack of influenza, which, in Mrs. Elwin's case, turned to bronchitis. "I may recover," she said to him, "but I may not." As the illness proceeded, she hoped that, having been called thus far on the way, she might not have to return. She had been almost everything to her husband during their long life, and the anticipation of her death threw him into an intense agitation. He could not sleep or eat, but paced the room below for hours together in feverish anxiety. She consoled him by saying that she was sure he would not survive her for long, to which he assented, and found comfort in the thought. Contrary to expectation she recovered, though to enfeebled vitality, which presently indicated itself by a threatening cancer. They both recognised that this was a certain sign of an approaching separation. She was content, and he accepted the position bravely. It was then that the full strength of his character came out. During the progress of the disease he schooled himself to look the prospect in the face, and anticipated all its circumstances. He used afterwards to say that these two years which he was still privileged to spend with her had been to him the happiest of their married life. There was, however, a sad change in its conditions. She suffered greatly, and became very feeble, though she persisted in carrying on her usual habits with rare tenacity and courage, mainly in order that he might feel as little difference as possible.



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EXTERIOR OF BOOTON CHURCH, AS REBUILT.

During this period of waiting expectation Booton Church was approaching completion. The last and slowest part of the work had been the erection of a west front, flanked by two graceful towers, which were the best feat of his architectural skill. Taken as a whole, both in conception and in structure, the building was a wonderful achievement for an amateur, untrained in any branch of practical architecture. He was very diffident about the result himself, required reiterated commendation from those whose opinion he cared for, before he would be convinced that their appreciation was genuine, and laughed whenever his wife called it "a work of genius." Its excellence, however, was recognised widely, and the church at once became a common object for sight-seeing tourists.

A bell was hung in each of the western towers, and the occasion drew from Whitwell Elwin his last effort at poetical composition, in the shape of a hymn to be sung on the Sunday following the placing of the bells in position :—

Ring bells, ring out thy holy chime,  
That speeding through the pliant air,  
Tells in the tongue of sainted time  
The hour draws on for blended prayer.

Come, hearers, come with willing feet  
While faith and hope your hearts upraise,  
For called by Christ Himself we meet  
To join in penitence and praise.

Let marriage peals spread far and wide  
At hallowed rite twice blest on high,  
Since Christ has made His Church His bride,  
And wedded love a double tie.

The note is changed—a note of dread,  
By right we mourn the severed years,  
And He who wept for Laz'rus dead,  
By weeping sanctified our tears.



We mourn, but Christ rich comfort brings,  
Who taught us that the parted soul  
Is borne aloft on angels' wings,  
And Paradise the priceless goal.

Now festal tones from lofty tow'r  
Proclaiming mercies, peal on peal,  
Again attest Thy mighty pow'r  
To speak for all what each should feel.

Sweet bells in worship, griefs, and joys,  
Whatever path by man is trod,  
Thy voice his piety employs,  
That voice to him the voice of God.

The lines were dated January, 1898. Mrs. Elwin was by this time rapidly sinking, unable to leave her room, and often in great paroxysms of pain. Elwin went through the time with tender solicitude, and though he felt it acutely, there was a wonderful contrast between his self-possession now and his agitation in the similar crisis two years before. He was able to take it calmly, and on her account thankfully, when on February 21st she relapsed into a state of unconsciousness, from which he perceived there could be no rally. She died the following day, Shrove Tuesday, February 22nd, 1898. He was so much master of himself that he was able at once to sit down to write the necessary letters, and to make the necessary arrangements, without any aid.

He wrote to his brother, Peter Elwin, Rector of Itteringham, in Norfolk: "The blessed Fanny died last night. She was 83. Her last illness was, if possible, diviner than the lovely life that preceded it. She had lived for years in the heavens, and though no one could be happier in her fervent affections and home, her heart's desire was to get to the eternal world. I am bound by my very devotion to her to be grateful that her longing is fulfilled. The

precious memories will be like a presence to me. Don't write. I am best left to my own musings."<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Elwin's features in death relapsed into a likeness to a sketch made of her in her youth, which hung in the house; but he did not recognise this, and after looking once at the face, said it was so unlike what he had been familiar with that he did not care to see it again, and he did not enter the room a second time. In everything he remained calm and collected. He felt however that he would not be able to endure a concourse at the funeral, and she was therefore buried with great simplicity, without any gathering of friends or relatives, except the one surviving son who was in England. The other, Edward, a member of the community of St. John the Evangelist at Cowley, was in India, and his married grandson, who had lived much at Booton, was also abroad.

Whitwell Elwin remarked that it was commonly said that feelings became blunted in old age, but that he did not find this the case with himself; his were as acute as ever. In the capacity for feeling he had not changed, but in the power of restrained self-discipline he had matured. There were early periods of his life when his wife's death would have shattered him. Even those who knew him best were amazed at the placid self-control with which he settled down to enter upon altered circumstances. He recognised that his own time must be short, and hastened to complete the little that remained to be done to the church, and to prepare the rectory house for a successor. "I am much too old," he said, "to do anything on my own account, but it has come home to me as a point of conscience that, after fifty years of neglect, I ought to get the house into a condition suitable for a rector and

<sup>1</sup> To the Rev. Peter J. Elwin, Feb. 23, 1898.

a rector's guests." It had been deferred chiefly because his wife was averse to every species of alteration. He set himself also to go through its contents, destroying the useless accumulations of years. He extended this to a wholesale destruction of correspondence and papers, many of them of considerable value, at least with reference to the knowledge of his own career. A pathetic sadness sometimes clouded him, but he resisted it, and maintained an equable mind. The second year he seemed to improve in health and spirits. Occasionally he turned faint, once or twice had a fall, and in the dark evenings of the autumn of 1899 he had a difficulty in finding his way on the roads. Otherwise he seemed vigorous. On the last day of the year, which was a Sunday, he took his services easily. On New Year's Day, 1900, he was planning to go into Norwich, on a charitable errand for a parishioner. He seemed perfectly well when he was called, but as the usual hour for his coming downstairs passed without his appearing, his servants got uneasy, and going up to his room found he had fallen back on his bed in the middle of dressing. Death had evidently been instantaneous. Slight symptoms of an affection of the heart had been suspected earlier in life, but had apparently disappeared, and had been forgotten.

On the following Friday he was laid in his own churchyard, by the side of his wife, with the simplicity which he would have wished for himself, and without any invitations to neighbours or friends. Work was, however, spontaneously suspended in the village, and his parishioners attended in mass. It was a dull winter's afternoon, with a heavy, leaden sky; but just as the coffin was about to be lowered, a faint gleam of sunshine broke out momentarily and played picturesquely over the grave. His parishioners afterwards, of their own



accord, all subscribed to put up a marble slab in the church, bearing the inscription—

IN MEMORY OF  
WHITWELL ELWIN,  
RECTOR OF BOOTON FOR 50 YEARS,  
WHO DIED  
JANUARY 1ST, 1900, AGED 83.

THIS MEMORIAL IS ERECTED IN LOVING ADMIRATION  
BY HIS PEOPLE.

TO THE GLORY OF GOD HE DESIGNED AND REBUILT  
THIS CHURCH.

Elwin was rather under middle stature, slightly but firmly built, with great muscular strength and vivacity in all his movements. A wide forehead, above massive eyebrows, fell backwards in a gentle curve, which gave a peculiar and striking contour to the head. From early manhood he had been nearly bald. His eyes were a rich brown, bright, and penetrating. A prominent nose, and a strong, large mouth, were marked features in his face. A north-country worthy who was once shown his photograph, gazed at it, and said, "Ah! but that's a fine head." Then he pointed to the prominent brows, and remarked, "There's eloquence there, if I am not mistaken," adding, after a pause, "and firmness too." The only portrait that was ever painted of him was by Mr. Henry Weigall, A.R.A., in 1876, as a gift to Mrs. Elwin.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Murray commissioned him to make a copy of it to be hung in his house in Albemarle Street.<sup>2</sup> After dining there, in 1881, Elwin wrote to his wife, "I sat opposite my own portrait at dinner, which elicited many remarks from the company,

<sup>1</sup> This portrait was left by his will to his grandson and heir, Fountain Peter Elwin.

<sup>2</sup> Now in the possession of Mr. A. H. Hallam Murray.

from the singular force of the likeness. All pronounced the portrait to be admirable."

That Whitwell Elwin's genius was calculated to make a greater mark than he chose to win for it, none could doubt who ever knew him. But it would be profitless to consider whether it would have been used to more advantage under different conditions from those under which it was actually exercised. He would himself have regarded such an inquiry, not only as futile, but as false in its premisses. No object of life appeared to him more barren than aspiration to eminence for its own sake,—no life more satisfactory than that of simple fulfilment of duty in useful obscurity.

# LIST OF WHITWELL ELWIN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE QUARTERLY REVIEW

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## COWPER

IN its first form the Life of Cowper appeared in the Quarterly Review for January, 1860. It was a favourite subject with the author. To none of his essays did he return so often in later days with real interest in their revision. It was this paper which weighed with him more than any other in demurring to a mere reprint of his articles under his own sanction. He considered that increased study had added to his understanding of the poet's malady, while a change in his own theological standpoint had led him to alter his opinion as to the religious influences to which Cowper was subjected at Olney. Most winters, in the latter part of his life, saw him fitfully engaged on rewriting the Memoir. Any prospect of its being finished was, however, rendered improbable by his fastidious taste. He was always finding it necessary to begin again at the beginning ; and, though he left two manuscripts of the Life fairly complete as far as they went, the first only took Cowper to the end of his London career, and the second not quite so far.

In the following pages the Quarterly Review article, these two fragments, and such other memoranda as were available, have been combined. The early portion mainly follows the first and best of the expanded versions of Cowper's younger life, while the remainder follows the Quarterly paper, with supplementary interpolations and corrections from note-books. A compilation of this kind labours under obvious disadvantages, both to its structure and literary finish. It seems, however, better to incur these inevitable defects than to suppress the essay, which could not well have been reprinted as it stood in the Review, without the modifications which its writer thought necessary to make it suitable for republication.

In the version of the early life which has chiefly been adopted the work is divided into chapters. These divisions have been retained, and for the sake of uniformity the same system has been applied to the remainder.

A sketch of Lord Thurlow's character, which formed an unwieldy excrescence in one of the manuscripts, is too good to be omitted, and has therefore been appended separately at the end.

<sup>1</sup> See *Memoir*, above, pp. 227, 345.



21/ was shut out by an insuperable barrier from a profession which more than any other demanded militant faculties, unshaken nerves, & an ever watchful self-protection. An intuitive consciousness of the infirmity which would have paralysed him later may have had its share in estranging him from a futile study. But his inability to endure the study itself was an effectual impediment. Confined to the garden path, & debarred from his usual out-lying walks, during the prolonged winter of 1784, he suffered from a severe disorder of stomach. To account for it he told Newton that "till he was more than thirty years old it was almost essential to his comfort to be perpetually on motion".<sup>1</sup> This restlessness was a

1. To Newton, March 19, 1785.

craving of his system for air & exercise which could not be defied with impunity. The joyous games between lessons saved, & but barely saved, him at Westminster from his hypochondriacal malady. The tamer amusements which succeeded were the means of warding off attacks which would have been precipitated by attempts to become ~~eminent~~ <sup>eminent</sup> in the law. His instincts dictated a wiser regimen than his reason, & suspended calamities which the chances of life provoked before long. It was only in moments when he was oblivious of the catastrophes which had overtaken him, & their immediate cause that he could regret not to have striven to be a distinguished lawyer, or could have ascribed his fate to his folly.

Few men make the most of their opportunities, & without injury to his health Cowper might have done more with his. But he omitted to trace a considerable portion of his literary accomplishments to its source when, counting from the date of his leaving school, he affirmed that he "devoted all the earliest parts of his life to amusement only," meaning by amusement unprofitable diversions. In spite of wasted hours & the three years he lodged with Mr. Chapman, & the twelve he passed at the Temple, bore golden fruits. From his Narrative we gather that he



# COWPER

## CHAPTER I

**S**PENCER COWPER, the grandfather of the poet, was the brother of William Cowper, the distinguished Lord Chancellor, and was himself a Judge in the Court of Common Pleas. The poet's father, John Cowper, was Spencer Cowper's second son. His mother was Anne Donne, the daughter of Roger Donne, of Ludham, in Norfolk. Dr. John Johnson, the grandson of her brother, states that she was descended by four different lines from King Henry III. The poet alluded to this circumstance in the famous piece which he wrote upon receiving her picture :

My boast is not that I deduce my birth  
From loins enthroned, and rulers of the earth ;  
But higher far my proud pretensions rise—  
The son of parents passed into the skies.<sup>1</sup>

These parents lived at Great Berkhamstead, in Hertfordshire, of which parish Dr. Cowper was rector, and there William was born, on the 15th of November (old style), 1731. The children of the Rector of Berkhamstead were

<sup>1</sup> Mr. John Bruce, in his *Memoir of Cowper*, says that the poet, instigated by Dr. Johnson, certified his pedigree, conjointly with some of his Donne relatives, to the College of Arms, where it was duly registered. But Mr. Bruce adds that the pedigree is without proof ; and, assuming the material part of it to be correct, the genealogy could confer no distinction. Numbers of people in humble life are descended from English kings, and Cowper's own progenitors had dwindled down, in the person of his mother's maternal grandfather, to a Mr. Bruin Clench, of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields.—[Cowper's *Poetical Works*, Aldine ed., vol. i. p. xiv.]



a fragile race. Five of them died in infancy, and William alone remained when his mother gave birth, on November 7th, 1737, to her seventh child, which was Cowper's much-loved brother John. The birth was fatal to her. Six days afterwards she herself departed this life, aged thirty-four. The picture verses in which Cowper, upwards of half a century later, commemorated her motherly devotion to him, and his own grief and desolation at the loss of it, speak by their simple truth and expressive language to every heart. He says, in one of his letters to Lady Hesketh, "I loved her with an affection that her death, fifty-two years since, has not in the least abated."<sup>1</sup> But the most remarkable evidence of the hold she had on his feelings appears in a letter he wrote to Joseph Hill, in 1784. "Not a week passes, perhaps I might with equal veracity say a day, in which I do not think of her. Such was the impression her tenderness made upon me, though the opportunity she had for showing it was so short."<sup>2</sup>

The loss of his mother changed Cowper's life. A new arrangement had to be made for him, and his father sent him to a "considerable school" of high character, kept by a Dr. Pitman, at Market Street, in Hertfordshire.<sup>3</sup> Hayley asserts that Cowper's infancy "was delicate in no common degree," and thinks it evidence of his father's unfitness to manage his sickly little son, that he should have subjected him to the rigours of school.<sup>4</sup> Cowper was of another opinion. His father, he said, "had a sad task imposed on him, but no man could acquit himself of such a one with more discretion, or with more tenderness."<sup>5</sup> There are several indications that the peculiar delicacy of constitution which Hayley ascribed to Cowper in childhood was his own mistaken inference from circumstances which he wrongly interpreted. It is nowhere mentioned

<sup>1</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, Feb. 26, 1790.]      <sup>2</sup> [To Hill, Nov., 1784.]

<sup>3</sup> [Cowper's *Memoir of his Early Life*, p. 1.]

<sup>4</sup> Hayley's *Life and Letters of Cowper*, vol. i. pp. 72, 74.

<sup>5</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, April 30, 1790.]

by Cowper himself. His father could not be ignorant that he must suffer in the abrupt transition from the fostering care of a "most indulgent mother" to the rougher usages which are unavoidable wherever boys are congregated, and as he saw no cause for exempting him from the common lot, it is reasonable to suppose that none existed.

The inevitable happened. "Here," says Cowper, "I had hardships of different kinds to conflict with, which I felt more sensibly, in proportion to the tenderness with which I had been treated at home." Like multitudes before him, he would soon have got accustomed to them had it not been his sad fate to experience exceptional barbarities from a lad of fifteen, who contrived to inflict on him, through the long space of two years, a series of tortures in secret. "His savage treatment of me," says Cowper, "impressed such a dread of his figure upon my mind, that I well remember being afraid to lift up my eyes upon him higher than his knees, and that I knew him by his shoe-buckles better than any other part of his dress."<sup>1</sup> On the detection of his inhuman practices he was expelled, and his victim removed. Hayley relates that in "the most cheerful hours of his advanced life," Cowper could hardly describe without shuddering his wretchedness from the persecution he sustained.<sup>2</sup>

At the time of Cowper's removal from Market Street, specks had appeared on his eyes, and threatened to spread, which caused his being sent, at the age of eight, to reside with Mr. Disney, an eminent London surgeon and oculist, whose wife in the latter department had a reputation equal to his own. He remained with this medical couple for a year, but derived no advantage from their treatment. As his education was suspended, and there was no prospect of a cure, he was transferred to Westminster, the school of his grandfather, Spencer Cowper, and here, his mind recruited by his lengthened holiday with the oculist, he

<sup>1</sup> [*Early Life*, p. 2.]

<sup>2</sup> [Hayley's *Cowper*, vol. i. p. 75.]

returned to his studies, retaining, or easily recovering, the rudiments he had learnt at Dr. Pitman's, and, as we may easily believe, moved lightly along the road over which he had toiled but heavily before.

He had been two or three years at Westminster when he was seized, in his twelfth or thirteenth year,<sup>1</sup> with a dangerous attack of small-pox. The inflammation of the eyes attendant on this disorder has impaired or destroyed the sight of thousands. It proved salutary to Cowper by consuming the spots which threatened him with blindness. Infectious diseases come from without, and not from inward debility. His general health was robust, and it was of some period of his stay at Westminster that he says, "Surveying my activity and strength, and observing the evenness of my pulse, I began to entertain, with no small complacency, a notion that, perhaps, I should never die." This suggestion of an exuberant vitality was quickly checked. "I was soon after struck with a lowness of spirits uncommon at my age, and frequently had intimations of a consumptive habit."<sup>2</sup> The lowness of spirits was the first recorded fit of that hypochondriacal malady which became, in its severer forms, the scourge of his life. The consumptive symptoms, after convincing him that he was mortal, passed away altogether, and were carefully concealed by him while they lasted, from the belief that bodily infirmity, especially consumption, was a disgrace. His opinion is explained by the circumstance to which Southey bore testimony, that in schools, "bodily endowments hold the first, mental the second place."<sup>3</sup>

Strong as well as healthy, his limbs cast in a sturdy mould, he was noted for his prowess in games which demanded the union of agility and vigour. "I excelled at cricket and football," he wrote, in 1781, "but the fame

<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Hayley in 1792 Cowper says that he remained two years with the oculist, and had the small-pox when he was fourteen. I have followed the statement in his *Narrative*, which was written more than a quarter of a century earlier, when his memory was fresher.

<sup>2</sup> [*Early Life*, p. 5.]

<sup>3</sup> [*Esperiella Letters*, 3rd ed., vol. ii. p. 231.]



I acquired by achievements in that way is long since forgotten, and I do not know that I have made a figure in anything since.”<sup>1</sup> The reverse of a puny lad, he was from childhood foremost in sports, and the retrospect could warm him into transport, when writing a poem of which the purport was to denounce the evil of schools. He does not hesitate to declare in his *Tirocinium* that those who are not touched at the sight of the playground of their early days, have hearts of stone, and can feel for nothing.<sup>2</sup>

Cumberland, who boarded for a few months in the same house with Cowper at Westminster, says, in his *Autobiographical Memoir*, that the head master, Dr. Nichols, was “a complete fine gentleman in his office,” that “his principle was to cherish every spark of genius in his scholars,” and that he “so exercised his authority that the best motives for obeying him might spring from affection.”<sup>3</sup> This vainglorious and untrustworthy writer was prone to exaggerate, and the characteristics Cowper selected to designate the doctor’s mode of government do not convey the same impression with the honied language of Cumberland. In his poem called *Valediction*, he reminds Colman, the dramatist, that they were school-fellows and play-fellows, “where Nichols swung the birch and twined the bays,” and there is indisputable evidence that a free use of the rod was prominent among the methods by which he rather enforced than encouraged obedience. The bays fell to Cowper’s share, and with his aptitude for learning he may not have needed the discomforts of punishment to assist the allurements of reward; but, though he

<sup>1</sup> [To Rev. W. Unwin, May, 1781.]

<sup>2</sup> [Be it a weakness, it deserves some praise,  
We love the play-place of our early days.  
The scene is touching, and the heart is stone  
That feels not at that sight, and feels at none.

*Tirocinium*, lines 296-9.]

<sup>3</sup> *Memoirs of Richard Cumberland*, vol. i. p. 71.

commended the mode in which Dr. Nichols prepared his boys for Confirmation,<sup>1</sup> he nowhere bestows upon him, in passages which would have called it forth had he deemed it deserved, a single word of praise in connection with his general teaching and management.

The celebrity of the school was Vincent Bourne, who was usher of the fifth form when Cowper passed through it. His Latin verse was distinguished for a rare gracefulness of expression,—pure, easy, and harmonious, not consisting of phrases culled from ancient poets, but original, and derived from his mastery over the language. But the accomplished poet was a negligent master, and his pupil owed nothing to his instruction. “He was so good-natured,” Cowper wrote to Unwin, “and so indolent, that I lost more than I got by him, for he made me as idle as himself.”<sup>2</sup> “He was so inattentive to his boys,” Cowper wrote, on another occasion, “and so indifferent whether they brought him good or bad exercises, or none at all, that he seemed determined, as he was the best, so to be the last Latin poet of the Westminster line.”<sup>3</sup> The measure the school took of him seems to have been regulated by his foibles and amiable weaknesses, more than by his poetical gifts. It was one of his failings that he was a sloven in his dress and person; and “I remember,” says Cowper, “seeing the Duke of Richmond set fire to his greasy locks, and box his ears to put it out again.”<sup>4</sup> The pupil certainly acquired none of the master’s skill in classic composition. The Latin verses of Cowper are not harmonious in numbers, pure in expression, or even forcible in sentiment.

But, if not first in lessons, he had a place in the foremost rank. Describing, in a letter to Unwin, his power of fancy in conjuring up scenes till for a while they seemed real, he tells him that he had lately transported himself, thirty years backwards, to the sixth form at Westminster,

<sup>1</sup> [*Early Life*, p. 6.]

<sup>3</sup> To Mr. Rose, Nov. 30, 1788.

<sup>2</sup> To Unwin, May 23, 1781.

<sup>4</sup> [To Unwin, May 23, 1781.]

where, says he, "I was a schoolboy in high favour with my master, received a silver groat for my exercise, and had the pleasure of seeing it sent from form to form, for the admiration of all who were able to understand it."<sup>1</sup> Before he left Westminster his lessons had ceased to be a task, and he and Sir Richard Sutton, who was the prodigy of the school in his capacity for languages, read the whole of the Iliad and Odyssey in play hours.<sup>2</sup> A knowledge of classics grew to be his single test of merit. "I valued a man," he says, "according to his proficiency and taste in classical literature, and had the meanest opinion of all other accomplishments unaccompanied by that." A little experience of the world taught him, he says, that there were other attainments which would carry a man more handsomely through life than perpetually revolving and expounding what Homer and Virgil had left behind them.<sup>3</sup> With the improved judgment of later years he was always ready to smile at the indiscriminate eulogies convention had sanctioned in speaking of classical authors.<sup>4</sup> The narrow prejudices which wore away with increased cultivation may have been a benefit at Westminster. They helped to concentrate his attention on the studies which made him a scholar for life in his youth.

With the benefits of Westminster he did not escape a vice, which is always common in societies where the detection of a fault is followed by a punishment. He became, according to his own account, an adept in falsehood, and was seldom guilty of a misdemeanor that he could not "invent an apology, capable of deceiving the wisest."<sup>5</sup> Southey was confident that Cowper, in his frenzy of self-accusation, had no foundation for his remorse. "It may well be believed," he says, "that he imposed upon himself in a far greater degree than

<sup>1</sup> [To Unwin, undated, placed by Southey in 1786.] He afterwards repeated the circumstance in his *Table Talk*, v. 506.

<sup>2</sup> To Unwin, Dec. 31, 1785.

<sup>3</sup> To Newton, Feb. 18, 1781.

<sup>4</sup> To Hill, May 24, 1788.

<sup>5</sup> [*Early Life*, p. 7.]



he had ever imposed upon an usher, for lying is certainly not one of those vices which are either acquired or fostered at a public school."<sup>1</sup> It is certain, on the contrary, that Cowper's lies of exculpation, or what Thackeray calls "the fibs permitted by scholastic honour,"<sup>2</sup> were an established practice. In one way he may have been less adroit than he imagined. The power of deception depends much on the amount of confidence reposed in the deceiver, and the gentle manners, ingenuous countenance, and general good behaviour of the boy may have had a larger share in procuring a ready belief to his tales than any extraordinary proficiency to which he had attained in the arts of imposition. "As universal a practice," says Swift, "as lying is, and easy as it seems, I do not remember to have heard three good lies in all my conversation, even from those who were most celebrated in that faculty." This remark of an acute observer of human nature, that lies are generally as weak as they are wicked, is worthy to be treasured by men who fear no other consequences than discovery, though Swift fell into the fallacy of assuming that he had always detected the falsehoods, whereas those which were most ingenious may have been mistaken by him for truths.

The old saying, which originated in days of sharp discipline, that school days were even then the happiest days of life, may have been true of Cowper. The frequent assumption that he was a crushed, nervous, melancholy boy at Westminster, because he was shy in company, is the reverse of the truth. "If I had never tasted true happiness," he said, in a letter to Unwin, "I was at least equally unacquainted with its contrary."<sup>3</sup> General statements are to be understood with the qualifications inherent in them, and his small-pox, and fit of low spirits, and

<sup>1</sup> [Southey, *Life of Cowper, Works*, Bohn's ed., vol. i. p. 8.]

<sup>2</sup> [*Roundabout Papers*, "On a Chalk Mark on the Door."]

<sup>3</sup> [Undated letter, 1786?]

season of consumptive symptoms, were but his share of the ills from which no condition is exempt. In all else a public school was for him a congenial atmosphere. Playground and class-room were both dear to him, for in both he had the exultation which waits upon success, and his friends mostly belonged to the superior class who attained distinction.

In his maturity he spoke slightly of school friendships, on the ground that they were short-lived for reasons he specified,—that the man, frequently differing from the boy, in principles, temper, and conduct, those who were once inseparable no longer suited each other; that they were divided by distance, by dissimilar employments, by new claims and connections which effaced old remembrances; and that, from the operation of these influences, not one of his seven or eight friends was left to him in ten years' time.<sup>1</sup> The result, and the reasons for it, were true in a multitude of instances. But the friendships were not therefore nugatory because they were short-lived. School-boys had the profit and pleasure of friendships suited to their years, nor did the benefits end with the friendships. Affection, like other virtues, must be cultivated to flourish, and youthful ardours were the preparation for subsequent ties.

Of Cowper's religious life at school, from his entrance to the Market Street establishment at the age of six to his leaving Westminster at eighteen, we have his own express history. His two years at Market Street gave rise to only a single thought on the subject, and this he owed to the tyrant who plagued him there. Waiting for him, and ready to cry, he recalled the words of the Psalmist, "I will not be afraid of what man can do unto me." "Instantly," he says, "I perceived in myself a briskness of spirits, and a cheerfulness which I had never before experienced." "This early effort towards a dependance on the blessed God was the first and last instance of the

<sup>1</sup> To Unwin, Oct. 5, 1780.

kind between infancy and manhood."<sup>1</sup> He passes on to a slight event which he "numbered among the best religious documents"<sup>2</sup> he received during his seven years at Westminster. He was crossing St. Margaret's churchyard in the dark, when a sexton, who was digging a grave by the light of a lantern, threw up a skull which struck him on the leg. This alarmed his conscience, but "the impression presently went off,"<sup>3</sup> and it was not likely that it would remain. He had no second reminder calculated to work a change in him till his headmaster prepared him for Confirmation. For the first time since his birth Cowper "attempted prayer in secret," found it "a painful task," was frightened by his insensibility, persevered in his distasteful efforts till his Confirmation was over, and relapsed shortly afterwards into "a total forgetfulness of God, with the usual disadvantage of being more hardened, for having been softened to no purpose."<sup>4</sup> His "imminent danger" in the attack of small-pox did not revive in him the superficial impulses towards religion he had imbibed and abandoned. "Neither in the course of it," he says, "nor during my recovery, had I any sentiment of contrition, any thought of God or eternity. On the contrary, I was scarcely raised from the bed of pain and sickness before the emotions of sin became more violent in me than ever; and Satan seemed rather to have gained than lost an advantage."<sup>5</sup> The total effect that Westminster had on Cowper, under a Christian aspect, is told by him in a single sweeping sentence. "Whatever seeds of religion I might carry thither, before my seven years' apprenticeship to the classics was expired, they were all marred and corrupted; the duty of the schoolboy swallowed up every other; and I acquired Latin and Greek at the expense of a knowledge much more important."<sup>6</sup> Nearly half a

<sup>1</sup> [*Early Life*, p. 3.]

<sup>2</sup> This word was common in Cowper's day in the sense of "admonition" or "warning."

<sup>3</sup> [*Early Life*, p. 4.]    <sup>4</sup> [*Ibid.*, p. 6.]    <sup>5</sup> [*Ibid.*, p. 7.]    <sup>6</sup> [*Ibid.*, p. 4.]



century passed, and Southey found the system unaltered. "It cannot," he says, "be gainsaid that our boarding-schools are unfavourable to those devotional feelings, the seeds of which have been sown in early childhood, and destructive of those devotional habits which have been learned at home." "It is a great evil," he continues, "but Cowper did not reflect upon its natural and obvious causes, when he accounted for it by saying that the duty of a schoolboy swallowed up every other. In his days, and in my own, that duty left time enough for idleness, or recreation, or the pursuits of private study to those who were studiously disposed. But at no time has a schoolboy's life offered any encouragement, any inducement, any opportunity for devotion."<sup>1</sup> It was not time that was wanting, but inclination. Southey has specified the real source of the mischief in charging it upon the uniform exclusion of religion from the usages and feelings of the place.

## CHAPTER II

SEVEN years was the usual term allotted to the complete course at Westminster, and Cowper finished his in his eighteenth year. His ultimate destiny was the bar, and his name had already been entered at the Middle Temple, April 29, 1748. After a holiday of nine months, in his father's rectory at Berkhamstead, he was sent to reside with Mr. Chapman, a London solicitor, to whom he was articulated for three years. It was Cowper's abiding opinion, early and late, that the law was "the least amusing" profession in the world,<sup>2</sup> and he says he engaged in it rather "to gratify a most indulgent father," than because he had any hopes of success in it himself.<sup>3</sup> It was not unnatural that the rector, whose own father had been a Justice of the Common Pleas, and his father's

<sup>1</sup> [Southey's *Life of Cowper*, vol. i. p. 8.]

<sup>2</sup> To Mr. Churchey, Dec. 13, 1786. <sup>3</sup> To Mrs. King, March 3, 1788.

brother Lord Chancellor, should destine one of his sons for the bar. The distinction with which William had pursued his classical studies at school, the taste and elegance which promised to adorn his solid acquirements, the combination in him of talent, and, judged by his Westminster career, of steady application to books, pointed him out as a person who was singularly fitted for the calling. Until he had failed, his friends must have been confident he would triumph. But other agencies were at work, and the legal eminence of the past generation of Cowpers, the prizes of the bar, and the expectations of his family, were powerless to influence him. His attendance at Mr. Chapman's office was not compulsory, and neglecting altogether the purpose for which he was placed there, he merely slept at his house. His days were spent at the residence of his uncle, Ashley Cowper, in Southampton Row.

His uncle Ashley was his father's youngest brother, was himself a nominal barrister, with an inclination to literature, and author of a poem, printed in 1744, called "The Progress of Physic." He was a diminutive person, finical in his dress, and when, close upon eighty, he continued to follow the fashion of the hour, and wore a white hat of which the brim was lined with yellow, Cowper said that if it had been lined with pink he might have been mistaken for a mushroom, and been picked up, and sent off in a basket. This was written in mockery of the "folly and vanity" which, at his years, could tempt him to dress in the livery of fops. "He trembles," said Cowper, "upon the verge of fourscore: a white hat with a yellow lining is no indication of wisdom suitable to so great an age; he can go but one step further in the road of impropriety, and direct his executor to bury him in it."<sup>1</sup> But his frivolities of dress were joined to sterling virtues,—to good nature, imperturbable temper, and moral worth. He lavished his benevolence

<sup>1</sup> To Mrs. Newton, Aug., 1781.

on his nephew, who wrote, at his death, in 1788, "His heart towards me was ever truly parental"; and he said he owed "a tenderness and respect" to his memory which would never leave him.<sup>1</sup> He was a social man, voluble, earnest and vivacious in his talk;<sup>2</sup> and, chief attraction of his house, had two daughters, the inheritors of his best qualities. Cowper's adoption into the home was of old standing. He had frequented it on holidays while a schoolboy at Westminster, and said of his eldest cousin, Harriet, afterwards Lady Hesketh, "We were in a manner brought up together."<sup>3</sup> He commended her later for being "everything that was amiable and elegant," for her "affectionate behaviour, cheerfulness of conversation, and constant sweetness of temper," and twice mentions that he ever loved her as a sister.<sup>4</sup> Theodora, the second cousin, was for a period dearer still. He loved her with a lover's love, and they exchanged vows, with the knowledge, but without the formal sanction, of her parents. Such allurements might well entice a youth in his nineteenth year from his dreary desk at Mr. Chapman's, to luxuriate in the genial companionship at Southampton Row. "There," he says, "was I, and the future Lord Chancellor, constantly employed, from morning to night, in giggling and making giggle, instead of studying the law."<sup>5</sup>

Thurlow, "the future Lord Chancellor," was a fellow-clerk with Cowper at Mr. Chapman's. In the outset of their friendship Cowper predicted his eminence, and he liked to recall, in subsequent years, that he had given

<sup>1</sup> To Hill, June 8, 1788.

<sup>2</sup> He says to Lady Hesketh, of one whom he calls "our uncle Gifford," "In volubility, variety, and earnestness of expression, he very much resembles your father, and in the sweetness of his temper too."—Sept. 13, 1785.

<sup>3</sup> To Newton, Dec. 3, 1785.

<sup>4</sup> To Newton, Dec. 3, 1785; to Unwin, Jan. 14, 1786; to Newton, Aug. 5, 1786; to Lady Hesketh, Aug. 26, 1792.

<sup>5</sup> To Lady Hesketh, Aug. 26, 1792.



expression to this belief as he and Thurlow were drinking tea with an unnamed lady and her sister, at Bloomsbury, and he went so far as to hold that Thurlow's rejoinder was a deliberate undertaking on his elevation to secure an income for his less fortunate prophet. "I said, 'Thurlow, I am nobody, and shall be always nobody, and you will be chancellor. You shall provide for me when you are.' He smiled, and replied, 'I surely will.' 'These ladies,' said I, 'are witnesses.' He still smiled, and said, 'Let them be so, for I will certainly do it.'"<sup>1</sup> He wrote a few stanzas in 1779 upon his promotion, which took place in June, 1778, and the one thought turns upon the circumstance that his genius and knowledge, his discernment and eloquence, were so conspicuous in his youthful, "sportive days," that the most experienced and sagacious observers never doubted that he was destined for the woolsack. He uses the phrase "sportive days," mindful of Thurlow's gay propensities, when he forsook law books and parchments to indulge in flirtations with Cowper's merry cousins. Elsewhere Cowper mentions, among his rooted characteristics, that he was eminently "resolute and industrious."<sup>2</sup> Strong in mind, in body, and in will, he combined study and pleasure without detriment to either. Cowper was cast in a different mould. Thurlow redeemed his mirthful hours by persevering study morning and night. His fellow-clerk, less strenuous in his entire composition, followed his tastes in his reading as in his recreation. His life was not an unbroken round of frivolity, but he was impatient of restraint, and did nothing he disliked.

Cowper's three years with Mr. Chapman came to an end towards the close of 1752. "At the expiration," he says, "of this term I became, in a manner, complete master of myself, and took possession of a complete set of chambers in the Temple, at the age of twenty-one."<sup>3</sup> He kept on in his usual self-indulgent course till a sudden access of

<sup>1</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, Feb. 11, 1786.]

<sup>2</sup> To Unwin, July 18, 1778.

<sup>3</sup> [*Early Life*, p. 8.]

his constitutional malady converted his luxurious ease into agony. It may be inferred that his altered habits were responsible for the outbreak. He was under wholesome restraints at Mr. Chapman's. He must have kept reasonable hours at night, could not give entertainments, nor have been more than an occasional frequenter of the dissipated circles that abounded in the Temple and other Inns of Court. Cowper's hypochondriasis was intimately associated with disordered digestion,<sup>1</sup> and adopting the customs prevalent in his new society, his health may have suffered. While paying court to his fair cousin in Southampton Row, he was mortified at being disfigured by an obstinate eruption which broke out upon his face. After he had tried many remedies to no purpose, he had recourse to a quack, who cleared his skin of the humour, but drove the disease inwards. Horace Walpole mentions that George III. was suspected, not long before his marriage, of applying cosmetics for the same purpose, and with the same unhappy result.<sup>2</sup>

The predominant symptom with Cowper was a fearful dejection of mind. From the day when his morbid depression of spirits broke out in boyhood, he would appear to have been subjected to periodical inroads of the disorder in its milder shapes. The boding symptoms scarcely permit us to doubt that its seeds were inherent in his constitution. The presumption is strengthened by a sentence in his correspondence. "It pleased God that I should be born in a country where melancholy is the national characteristic, and of a house more than commonly subject to it."<sup>3</sup> The specific examples of the family tendency belong to unrecorded private history, but we know that his uncle Ashley had fits of melancholy

<sup>1</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, undated letter, 1785? "My stomach is in all respects a troublesome stomach."—*Ibid.*, July 5, 1788. "Long time I had a stomach that would digest nothing."—To Robert Smith, Dec. 20, 1788.]

<sup>2</sup> [Walpole's *Memoirs of George III.*, vol. ii. p. 82.]

<sup>3</sup> To Mrs. King, Aug. 4, 1791.

amounting to disease,<sup>1</sup> and that Ashley's second daughter, Cowper's love, lived to exhibit eccentricities inconsistent with sanity. Another member of the line was placed in confinement at Dr. Cotton's, shortly after Cowper was released from his care. "I find," he wrote to Hill, Aug. 5, 1769, "that the vacancy I left at St. Alban's is filled up by a near relation." In anticipation of his meeting Lady Hesketh, after an interval of more than twenty years, he reminded her of their ancient habit of laughing "at anything, or nothing," and tells her that, in this respect, she will not find him at all altered. "A cloud perhaps may come over me now and then, for a few hours, but from clouds I was never exempted."<sup>2</sup> The cloud which overshadowed him at the commencement of 1753 was only peculiar in this, that it was the blackest he had hitherto known. "Day and night," he says, "I was upon the rack, lying down in horror, and rising up in despair. I presently lost all relish for those studies to which I had before been closely attached; the classics had no longer any charms for me; I had need of something more salutary than amusement, but I had no one to direct me where to find it."<sup>3</sup>

His malady had reached the stage in which it is commonly called melancholia. In his poem entitled *Retirement*, he drew a vivid picture of the appearance he presented while under its malignant spell. Absorbed in the contemplation of his inward woes, he had the aspect of a moving statue, the slow and half-unconscious movements being those of an abstracted mind, and all indicative of extreme distress. His eyes were fixed with the vacant stare of a man insensible to outward objects. His once ready tongue was silent, and the moody silence was produced by the same concentration of thought upon the anguish within, a reverie of wretchedness. In his portrait of the victim, Cowper affirms that "this of all maladies

<sup>1</sup> To Hill, Oct. 27, 1766; Nov. 12, 1766; Nov. 12, 1776.

<sup>2</sup> To Lady Hesketh, June 4, 1786. <sup>3</sup> *Early Life*, p. 9.



claims most compassion, and receives the least." The excess of wretchedness, not having any adequate external cause, nor seeming to be of the order which arises from bodily ailment, is mistaken for a species of perverse illusion which might be dispelled by an effort of will. Many who would ridicule the notion that a man might, if he chose, dismiss a fever, will frequently incline to the belief that the victim of melancholia could, if he would, dismiss his misery. Hence the very pity the spectacle excites is often not unmixed with contempt. Cowper experienced, in his own person, that the "clumsy joke" of friends was a bitter aggravation to a distemper in which every sensation that waits upon existence is a pang. With sufferings seldom exceeded, he had to bear the raillery and reproach of those who mistook inexorable disease for the "forgery of fancy."<sup>1</sup>

The classical works to which he had previously been closely attached lost their charm from the disparity between their topics and the torments which possessed him; but after a while he got partial solace from an English author, whose style and ideas at any previous period would have been likely to repel him. "At length," he says in his *Narrative*, "I met with Herbert's Poems; and gothic and uncouth as they were, I yet found in them a strain of piety which I could not but admire. This was the only author I had any delight in reading. I pored over him all day long; and though I found not here what I might have found, a cure for my malady, yet it never seemed so much alleviated as while I was reading him." Poring incessantly over the poems, he might gradually have come to understand them better, had not "a very near and dear relative" advised the laying them aside, thinking "such an author more likely to nourish his disorder than to remove it."<sup>2</sup>

"In this state of mind," he says, "I continued near a twelvemonth," when, finding "the inefficacy of all human means," he once more turned to religion, and "betook him-

<sup>1</sup> [*Retirement*, lines 279 seq.]

<sup>2</sup> [*Early Life*, pp. 9, 10.]

self to God in prayer." "My hard heart," he says, "was at length softened, and my stubborn knees brought to bow. I composed a set of prayers, and made frequent use of them. Weak as my faith was, the Almighty, who will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, was graciously pleased to hear me."<sup>1</sup>

The lifting of the cloud was brought about by a change of scene which was recommended to him. His cousin Harriet had become engaged to Thomas Hesketh, "a born sailor," who had a yacht at Southampton, which caused her and some of her family to go thither, and they took their woe-stricken relative with them. "Soon after our arrival," he says, in his Narrative, "we walked to a place called Freemantle, about a mile from the town; the morning was clear and calm, the sun shone bright upon the sea, and the country on the borders of it was the most beautiful I had ever seen. We sat down upon an eminence, at the end of the arm of the sea which runs between Southampton and the New Forest. Here it was that, on a sudden, as if another sun had been kindled that instant in the heavens, on purpose to dispel sorrow and vexation of spirit, I felt the weight of all my misery taken off, my heart became light and joyful in a moment; I could have wept with transport had I been alone. I must needs believe that nothing less than the Almighty fiat could have filled me with such inexpressible delight; not by a gradual dawning of peace, but, as it were, with a flash of His life-giving countenance."<sup>2</sup> This was written some twelve years after the event, in the religious mood which grew out of his second great attack. Upwards of twenty years elapsed from the date of the Narrative, when his further experience of his disorder taught him that the suddenness of the transition was its regular concomitant. "The style of dispensation peculiar to myself," he wrote to Newton, September 2nd, 1788, "has hitherto been that of sudden, violent, unlooked-for change. When I have thought my-

<sup>1</sup> [*Early Life*, p. 10.]

<sup>2</sup> [*Ibid.*, p. 11.]

self falling into the abyss, I have been caught up again ; when I have thought myself on the threshold of a happy eternity, I have been thrust down to hell." The dispensation had not the peculiarity he imagined. Nothing is more singular in a disease so protracted and so imperious than the instantaneous manner in which it sometimes lets go its hold. Dr. Savage, in his treatise on Insanity, gives for an example the case of a patient who had been fifteen months dumb, not uttering a word, and was in the act of "being removed uncured from the Asylum," when he "suddenly woke up, conversed freely, and remained well for twelve years."<sup>1</sup>

When Cowper had satisfied himself that his cure came direct from heaven, he also believed that the divine interference was the answer to his prayers. At the time of his recovery this belief was only momentary. "I think I remember," he says, "something like a glow of gratitude to the Father of mercies for this unexpected blessing, and that I ascribed it to His gracious acceptance of my prayers. But Satan and my own wicked heart quickly persuaded me that I was indebted for my deliverance to nothing but a change of scene and the amusing varieties of the place. By this means he turned the blessing into a poison."<sup>2</sup> In his careless days it never occurred to him that the restorative effects of climate, like all the ordinary operations of nature, are the work of the Creator. In his better period he acknowledged the truth, but he appears to have forgotten it when, tracing his recovery to his Maker, he assumed that he must have been the subject of a supernatural interposition. It is a contracted piety which chiefly sees the hand of Providence in occasional acts, and overlooks the efficacy of pervading laws which at every instant, and in every particular, do His bidding.

Cowper spent several months at Southampton in the elasticity and joy of newly recovered health. He took no part in public gaieties. The assembly room, with its

<sup>1</sup> *Insanity*, by G. H. Savage, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> [*Early Life*, p. 11.]



dancing and cards, had no attraction for him. His three delights were a friend, a book, and the country. He had a lively companion in his cousin Harriet. With her he shared both walk and book.<sup>1</sup> They scrambled "over hedges and ditches in every direction"; they saw their entire world under its facetious aspect, and laughed till their sides ached; they read the Arabian Nights, and fastening as usual upon the comic element, the tales afforded them "a fund of merriment that deserves," says Cowper, "never to be forgot."<sup>2</sup> One unwelcome demand interfered at times with the enchantment of his holiday. The sea was the passion of Sir Thomas Hesketh, and it was the abhorrence of Cowper, except it was still, or when he contemplated it from the shore. "I was often pressed," he says, "into the service. But though I gave myself an air, and wore trousers,"<sup>3</sup> I had no genuine right to that honour, disliking much to be occupied in great waters, unless in the finest weather." He accounted for his distaste by his aversion to every species of confinement which did not allow him to free himself the instant he chose. "Could I have stepped out of it into a corn-field or a garden, I should have liked it well enough."<sup>4</sup> His confession that his dislike to the sea did not exist in fine weather is fatal to his explanation. The reason was the nervous tremor which was part of his disease, and

<sup>1</sup> [To Newton, Sept. 24, 1785.]

<sup>2</sup> To Lady Hesketh, Oct. 12, 1785; June 4, 1786.

<sup>3</sup> His remark that he gave himself a nautical air by wearing trousers has lost its significance for most readers. Trousers in his day were the badge of the sailor. The revolution in dress which brought them into general use belongs to the next century. For hundreds of years, amidst all the changes of fashion, they had never been worn by civilians. In Hogarth's picture of Chairing the Member the one-legged sailor alone wears trousers. In Stothard's plates to illustrate *Robinson Crusoe*, which were executed in 1790, his hero wears breeches before he sails, and trousers when he is depicted on the raft. In Bewick's tail-pieces to his *British Birds* the shipwrecked sailor praying on the rock is in trousers, and the rest of his numerous men, with one or two apparent exceptions, are in breeches. A few of his boys appear in trousers, and it may have been with boys that the change began.

<sup>4</sup> To Newton, Sept. 24, 1785.

which affected the whole of his character. He would have been unlike himself had he relished the play of winds and waves, with nothing between him and the deep but a plank.

Cowper's merry time at Southampton had, according to custom, its turn of dejection. His constitution had not undergone a radical change. He concluded "that nothing but a continued circle of diversion and indulgence of appetite" could secure him from a relapse.<sup>1</sup> His ostensible religion was a set of words without practical meaning. "I called myself indeed a Christian," he wrote in 1765, "but He who knows my heart knows that I never did a right thing, nor abstained from a wrong one, because I was so; but, if I did either, it was under the influence of some other motive."<sup>2</sup> In his Narrative he calls the principle which prevailed with him at Southampton "hellish," and allowed that it was prompted by his corrupt desires. All but the very scrupulous are prone to credit what they wish, and his wish to remain a man of pleasure overpowered his conscience and common sense. Resigning himself to his festive impulses, he burnt his prayers on his return to London, "and away," he says, "went all thoughts of devotion and dependence upon God my Saviour."<sup>3</sup>

### CHAPTER III

ON his return to his chambers at the Temple, Cowper was called to the bar, June 14, 1754. His formal instalment in his profession did not increase his attention to it. His long preceding illness had strengthened his indisposition to severe study, and he never aspired to be more than a barrister in name. Being a cultured man, he betook himself to such a measure of literature as beguiled his time,

<sup>1</sup> [*Early Life*, p. 12.]

<sup>2</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, July 4, 1765. Similarly to Mrs. Cowper, April 4, 1766.]

<sup>3</sup> [*Early Life*, p. 12.]

without vexing his indolence. Convinced by his cheerful months of light amusements at the seaside that religion and strict morals were not the proper regimen for melancholy, he also liberated himself from the restraints of an exacting conscience, and cast in his lot with convivial associates.

"Before my conversion," says Cowper, "sensual gratification was the weapon with which Satan sought to destroy me."<sup>1</sup> Those who knew him best esteemed him "a good sort of man"; and, comparing their lenient opinion of him with his subsequent reprobation of himself, he said that "a decent outside is all a good-natured world requires."<sup>2</sup> But the outside being decent, he could not have been, in any particular, an open, abandoned profligate, which is corroborated by one of his states of mind before he finally emerged from the crisis which changed the man of pleasure into a man of God. "I was sincerely sorry that I had not seized every opportunity of giving scope to my wicked appetites; and even envied those who, being departed to their own place before me, had the consolation to reflect that they had well earned their miserable inheritance by indulging their sensuality without restraint."<sup>3</sup> Unlike them, he had practised self-control, and the vices which were habitual with some of his comrades were only occasional with him. Yet, without exaggerating his frailties, and allowing for the bounds set to earnest undertakings by his constitution, we may admit that he did not censure unduly his life of lazy amusements, imperfect morals, and suspended religion.

Troubles came at intervals to interfere with Cowper's round of diversions. In July, 1756, he was summoned to the bedside of his dying father, and did not arrive in time to see him alive. He not only lost by this event an indulgent parent, but his favourite rural retreat, in the stated vacations when he exchanged his holiday in town for a holiday out of it. "There was," he says, "neither

<sup>1</sup> [*Early Life*, p. 70.]

<sup>2</sup> [*Ibid.*, p. 38.]

<sup>3</sup> [*Ibid.*, p. 62.]



tree, nor gate, nor stile, in all that country, to which I did not feel a relation, and the house itself I preferred to a palace."<sup>1</sup> His attachment was not to objects alone. The people were his familiars, and he was "a sort of principal figure" among them.<sup>2</sup> Accustomed from childhood to return to Berkhamstead as his central home, it had not struck him that the parsonage house would be transferred to strangers at his father's death. Nor till that death had actually occurred did he realise that he and his "native place were disunited for ever." "I sighed," he says, "a long adieu to fields and woods, from which I once thought I never should be parted, and was at no time so sensible of their beauties as just when I left them all behind me, to return no more."<sup>3</sup>

His father had married a second time, and his widow did not long survive him.<sup>4</sup> Who, or what kind of person she was, does not transpire, but there are incidental allusions to her in Cowper's letters which imply that she was not regarded with disfavour either by him or the family.<sup>5</sup> The fondness with which he speaks of the Berkhamstead rectory to the last is evidence of itself that her presence was not a drawback to its delights.

The year after Cowper was deprived of his paternal country home, the house which had been to him a home in London was closed against him. In 1757 his uncle Ashley removed from Southampton Row to Old Palace Yard, Westminster, and it is conjectured that he availed himself of the change of residence to put a stop to the intercourse between his daughter Theodora and his nephew. She had been "faithful" to her lover "through tedious years of doubt and pain." They had been years of suspense, because her father had always withheld his assent to the engagement. Now he prohibited it. The reason

<sup>1</sup> To Mr. Rose, Oct. 19, 1787.

<sup>2</sup> To Mrs. King, Dec. 6, 1788.

<sup>3</sup> [To Mr. Rose, Oct. 19, 1787.]

<sup>4</sup> To Mrs. King, March, 3, 1788.

<sup>5</sup> To Hill, May 14, 1767; to Lady Hesketh, April 19, 1778; to Mrs. King, May 30, 1789.

he assigned was his objection to the marriage of cousins, which was common prudence when the cousins came of a family tainted with hypochondriasis, and when one of them had already been mad with its miseries for an unbroken twelvemonth. In 1755 Cowper addressed some lines to Theodora, under her poetic name of Delia, expressing his belief that she would never allow a rival to displace him. She fulfilled an expectation which he uttered in the transient belief that she would always remain the cherished object of his heart. Though she survived till 1824, she died single, and retained a proud affection for him to the last. It may be inferred from his amatory poems, written when his passion was at its height, that the attachment on his part was not excessive, especially for a man of his ardent disposition, who could not, as he said, "love much without loving too much."<sup>1</sup> They have the coldness of an exercise, and would not be supposed to have been prompted by a real occasion.

Cowper's misfortunes did not come singly. Sir William Russell, his old schoolfellow and cherished friend, was drowned in 1757 while bathing in the Thames. In some verses entitled "Disappointment," inserted in a lost letter to Lady Hesketh, and which exhibit more true feeling than any of his other pieces of the same date, Cowper, to account for the extreme dejection visible in him, says that it did not proceed from spleen, but from his grief at the loss of what he valued most—his "friend" and his "mistress." His emotions were strong, but usually evanescent, except when they were the abiding delusions of disease. "My feelings," he wrote to Unwin, May 8th, 1780, "are all of the intense kind. I never received a *little* pleasure from anything in my life; if I am delighted, it is in the extreme. The unhappy consequence of this temperature is that my attachment to any occupation seldom outlives the novelty of it. That nerve of my imagination that feels the touch of any particular amusement, twangs under the energy

<sup>1</sup> To Mr. Rowley, in an undated letter, written about 1785.

of the pressure with so much vehemence that it soon becomes sensible of weariness and fatigue." His love of persons followed this law of his nature. His verses in which he sets forth his distress on the sudden death of Sir William Russell and the extinction of his hope of being united to Theodora, exhibit his usual violence of feeling. He looks upon himself as a wanderer cast forth on an unknown wild before his distant journey was half accomplished, or as a sailor who has lost the dear companions of his voyage, and stands neglected on the rude coast of the world. He sees nothing left for him but solitude and despair. But his anguish does not appear very poignant, and left no scar. His lament was composed in 1757, and in the following year he was lavishing his admiration upon a young lady at Greenwich, without any hope, it is true, that she could become Mrs. Cowper, but with too much fervour to be consistent with the notion that he cared any longer for Delia. A letter to her sister, Lady Hesketh, which bears the date of August, 1763, shows that it was then understood in the family that his affection was extinct, and that it was supposed he would miss no opportunity which occurred of bestowing it elsewhere. He must have consoled himself some while before August, 1758, for his broken engagement with his cousin, since he had already talked often to Mr. Rowley of the "loved and lovely girl" at Greenwich. "You will perceive," he says, "I am tormented with love."<sup>1</sup> He was not so tormented but that he was looking forward to going a few days later to Marylebone Gardens, a place, he said, of which the delights could not be sufficiently extolled. Not a trace was left of the desolate outcast who complained to Lady Hesketh that all which soothed a heart free from anguish, all which delighted the happy, palled on him. With an income below his expenditure, and his little inheritance steadily wasting, he announces with complacency, at the ripe age of twenty-seven, that he has

<sup>1</sup> To Mr. Rowley, in a Latin letter, August, 1758.



resigned himself to social intercourse and frivolous diversions, and had abandoned the attempt to earn a subsistence by industry. "I am leading," he wrote, "an idle, and therefore, what is to me a most agreeable life."<sup>1</sup>

When he was verging upon threescore Cowper blamed himself for his negligence. "I was never a regular student," he wrote to Mr. Johnson, June 7th, 1790, "but lost the most valuable years of my life in an attorney's office, and in the Temple." He wrote a similar confession to Mr. Rose, July 23rd, 1789, and believed that, had he stuck to the law, he might have attained to a station of more importance to society than that of a poet. "The only use," he added, "I can make of myself now is to serve *in terrorem* to others, that they may escape (so far as my admonitions can have any weight with them) my folly and my fate." No one with the smallest tincture of letters would allow that Cowper would have been greater as a successful lawyer than as the author of the Task, and not less irrational was his fancy that he could have risen at the bar if he had tried. The imperious motives which might have impelled him to the effort were overruled by an infirmity implanted and invincible. It is clear that he was shut out by an impassable barrier from a profession which more than any other demanded militant faculties, unshaken nerves, and ever watchful self-possession. An intuitive consciousness of the infirmity which would have paralysed him later may have had its share in estranging him from a futile study. But his inability to endure the study itself was an effectual impediment. Confined to the garden path, and debarred from his usual outlying walks during the prolonged winter of 1784, he suffered from a severe disorder of the stomach, and to account for it he told Newton that till he "was more than thirty years old, it was almost essential to his comfort to be perpetually in motion."<sup>2</sup> This restlessness was a craving of his system

<sup>1</sup> To Mr. Rowley.

<sup>2</sup> To Newton, March 19, 1785.

for air and exercise, which could not be defied with impunity. The joyous games between lessons probably saved him, and but barely saved him, at Westminster, from his hypochondriacal malady. The tamer saunterings which succeeded were the means of warding off attacks which would have been precipitated by attempts to become eminent in the law. It was only in moments when he was oblivious of the catastrophes which had overtaken him, and of their immediate cause, that he could regret not to have striven to be a distinguished lawyer, or could have ascribed his fate to his folly.

Few men make the most of their opportunities, and, without injury to his health, Cowper might have done more with his. But he omitted to trace a considerable portion of his literary accomplishments to its source, when, counting from the date of his leaving school, he affirmed that he "devoted all the earliest parts of his life to amusement only." In spite of wasted hours, the three years he lodged with Mr. Chapman, and the twelve he passed at the Temple, bore golden fruit. From his Narrative we gather that he long remained faithful to his beloved classics, reading them purely for pleasure. Once again, as at Westminster, he went with elaborate care through the Iliad and the Odyssey, and this time with Mr. Alston, "a person of fine classic taste," and compared the original, "line by line," with the translation of Pope.<sup>1</sup> His classical reading meant only classical poetry. Released from school lessons, Greek and Latin prose authors were closed volumes to him. Cowper, always very modest in his estimate of his acquirements, and invariably underrating them, said, at sixty, to Mr. Park, "My learning lies in a very narrow compass. It is schoolboy learning somewhat improved, and very little more."<sup>2</sup> This was only true of his learning in the technical sense of the word. He had studied ancient works for their poetry, and not to

<sup>1</sup> To Mr. Hurdis, Aug. 9, 1791.

<sup>2</sup> To Mr. Park, March 10, 1792.

render himself a proficient in classic erudition. But to him they were better than learning; they were literature.

It was at the Temple that he discovered that other attainments than a familiarity with Homer and Virgil were necessary to recommend him to the world around him.<sup>1</sup> He abandoned his scholastic exclusiveness, and extended his reading to English poets. To read was his native bias. "I never," he said, "have been able to live without books since I first knew my letters."<sup>2</sup> It is to be specially noted of Cowper that when he read "to qualify himself for the world or for entertainment," he none the less read in the spirit of a student. He commenced the practice very young. When he speaks of his boyish devotion to Cowley, he says he *studied* him. At fourteen he began to get deeply imbued with Milton,<sup>3</sup> and, referring to this, at sixty, he says, "Few people have studied Milton more, or are more familiar with his poetry, than myself."<sup>4</sup> Hayley mentions among his characteristics that his reading was conformable to the rule of Pliny, *non multa, sed multum*,<sup>5</sup> and scattered passages in his letters confirm this statement. He says of Milton's Allegro and Penseroso, "I remember being so charmed with them when I was a boy that I was never weary of them."<sup>6</sup> That study was his constant usage at the Temple, when his authors were worthy of it, appears from a letter to Unwin, who had sent him the collection of poets to which

<sup>1</sup> To Newton, Feb. 18, 1781.

<sup>2</sup> To Lady Hesketh, Aug. 30, 1787.

<sup>3</sup> New to my taste, his Paradise surpass'd  
The struggling efforts of my boyish tongue  
To speak its excellence; I danced for joy.  
I marvell'd much that, at so ripe an age  
As twice seven years, his beauties had then first  
Engaged my wonder, and admiring still,  
And still admiring, with regret supposed  
The joy half lost because not sooner found.

*The Task*, book iv.

<sup>4</sup> To Mr. Rowley, Oct. 22, 1791.

<sup>5</sup> [Hayley's *Life of Cowper*, vol. iv. p. 181.]

<sup>6</sup> To Unwin, Jan. 17, 1782; March 21, 1784.



Johnson contributed the biographical prefaces. "Those of established reputation," he said, "are so fresh in my memory, though many years have intervened since I made them my companions, that it was like reading what I read yesterday over again."<sup>1</sup>

His reading in prose was desultory and confined, without falling short of what was usual among the average of educated men. In one department he had gone deeper than most lawyers of his generation; for, reviewing his religious state of mind in his London time, he says that he had "been always an industrious and diligent inquirer into the evidences by which the Gospel was externally supported."<sup>2</sup> Nor, in summing up the proceeds of the interval in which he asserted that he was wholly a trifler, must we overlook that he read French and Italian with ease. It is not likely that he learnt more than the crudest rudiments of them at school, if he commenced them there in any shape, and he mastered them not later than his early manhood.

On comparing Cowper's pursuits during the "three years misspent in an attorney's office, followed by several more equally misspent in the Temple,"<sup>3</sup> with his future achievements, it is evident that no amount of design could have directed him to apter discipline for his poetic calling. From the close of his London residence, he long abjured secular books, and though he returned to them in a slight measure before he commenced his first volume of poems, they were exclusively books of prose, and were only used to beguile his vacant hours. But, through the blank period when his old pursuits appeared to him vanity, he had retained the spoils of three great poetical literatures,—the Greek, the Latin, and the English,—and by virtue of unfaded memories, had taste, diction, and numbers at command. "I found myself in possession of many baubles," he said of his attainments when he bid adieu

<sup>1</sup> To Unwin, 1786.

<sup>2</sup> [*Early Life*, p. 14.]

<sup>3</sup> To Rose, July 23, 1789.

to the Temple, "but not one grain of solidity in all my treasures."<sup>1</sup> He wrote this to Newton on sending him his newly composed *Table Talk*, not reflecting that the poems on which he was engaged owed their value to the baubles he despised, and but for those baubles would have been despicable themselves.

Of Cowper's companions during his London residence, only two in his own estimation had been of advantage to him—Thurlow and Joseph Hill. "As to the rest of my connexions," he wrote to Hill, March 16, 1780, "anybody might see that they were too much like myself to be good for anything; disqualified by temper,"<sup>2</sup> and unfurnished with abilities to be useful either to themselves or others."

It may be taken for granted that Thurlow's companionship did much for the expansion of Cowper's mind during his twelve plastic years from twenty to thirty-three. Their training throughout the period was different. Thurlow's working hours preponderated; the bigger part of Cowper's life was vacation. Thurlow, faithful to his aspirations, directed all his faculties with native pertinacity to the end he had in view; Cowper, restless by constitution, applied to nothing which did not fall in with his passing inclination. His poetic faculty in outward form was but feebly developed, and he properly allowed his friend, whose range of thought and knowledge was much beyond his own, the post of honour. The immoral proclivities of Thurlow would not have troubled Cowper at the period when he was drawn to him by his talents and social charm. Dissimilarities and affinities conjoined to render them cordial allies. Fresh from their classical studies, they had the bond of scholarship, and were both of them enthusiastic readers of Greek and Latin authors. The

<sup>1</sup> To Newton, Feb. 18, 1781.

<sup>2</sup> He did not mean by "temper" that they were wanting in good humour. He used the word in its wider sense of "temperament," to indicate that their general conduct was not exemplary.

delight they both took in Milton showed a community of taste in English literature, and that a taste of the highest order. In other directions, beginning with law, the solid attainments of Thurlow far exceeded, in depth and variety, those of Cowper, who, in their "sportive days," must have imbibed from his comrade's reflections on men and things the species of instruction his growing years required. Thurlow's more masculine faculties were in bloom while those of Cowper were still in bud. The particular in which their natures were in opposite extremes would have had a fusing and not a repellent effect. Cowper, accomplished and by no means weakly compliant in his opinions, was yet timid in private life to such a degree that he shrank from conversing with a stranger, and the prospect of playing the smallest part in public drove him to despair. In later days he called his shyness a "vicious fear," and said it had "ruined" him.<sup>1</sup> Thurlow had none of it. His bold, unyielding disposition, equal to all emergencies, would have been an invigorating spectacle to the nervous fears of Cowper, and in a certain degree would have tended to facilitate his intercourse with Thurlow's circle of able Templars. Under his authoritative lead, the shy, retiring disposition of his bashful friend would have obtained the start it needed towards getting on familiar terms with a bigger world than his own.

At the close of 1763, the frenzy that drove this confident admirer to a lunatic asylum brought their intercourse to an end, and they never met again. The revolution wrought in Cowper's mind by his malady disqualified him on his recovery for general society, and renouncing London, he commenced life afresh, with new associates, new habits, and new tastes. That his friendship with his predicted keeper of the great seal had lasted up to the eve of the outbreak, is apparent from a trivial particular he recalled on his restoration to sanity. "If I am not mistaken,"

<sup>1</sup> [To Rose, Sept. 11, 1788.]



he wrote to Hill, "I owe Thurlow five guineas. Be so kind as to pay him when he happens to fall in your way."<sup>1</sup>

Among the mutual sympathies of Hill and Cowper, a taste for poetry had its share. Firm in his attention to his professional duties, Hill was impatient of encroachments on his legitimate holidays, but such was his partiality for "lofty rhyme" that the works of Tasso were the young attorney's recreation in his idlest hours. "I remember you," Cowper wrote in 1769, "with all the friendship I ever professed, which is as much as I ever entertained for any man." Nor had any man a stronger claim to his regard. While he was lost in the bewilderments of insanity, Hill, unsolicited, adopted him for a client, and for upwards of thirty years transacted gratuitously the whole of his frequent and often troublesome business. "He ever serves me in all that he can," Cowper said in 1784, "though he has not seen me these twenty years."<sup>2</sup>

Next to Thurlow and Hill, but with a wide interval, Cowper's chief associates were the members of the Nonsense Club, who had for their bond that they had

<sup>1</sup> [To Hill, Dec. 3, 1765.]

<sup>2</sup> [To Unwin, Nov. 20, 1784.] When he published his first volume of Poems, in 1782, he printed in it his stanzas, "On the Promotion of Edward Thurlow, Esq., to the Lord High Chancellorship of England," and having discharged his debt of homage to one of the two characters that were an exception to the rest of his London comrades, he was anxious in his second volume, published in 1785, to do honour to the other—"a tribute," he said, "so due that I must have disgraced myself had I not paid it." The stanzas on Thurlow set forth his rare intellectual gifts. The tribute to Hill treats of his moral qualities alone. In acknowledging the compliment, Hill modestly expressed the opinion that "honesty and friendship" were "not splendid enough for public celebration." "I must still think of them as I did before," was Cowper's reply, "that there are no qualities of the mind and heart that can deserve it better." [Oct. 11, 1785.] They were the qualities that dignify human nature. The Epistle had an abiding attraction for Charles Fox. He often spoke of it to Rogers with "high praise." (Dyce's *Table Talk of Rogers*, p. 96; *Recollections*, by Samuel Rogers, p. 34.) He wrote it in colloquial language, and with the easy flow of a gossiping letter in prose.

been educated at Westminster, and had a taste for literature and drollery. They were six in number, including Cowper, and dined together every Thursday. The name denoted that they were to give free vent in their talk to humorous fooling. The three professed authors of the company, for Cowper could not be reckoned in that class, aimed at pleasantry in their writings. Lloyd, the son of a second master at Westminster, and himself once an usher there, was capable of nothing higher than sprightly jingle. He died, a prisoner for debt, in the Fleet. Colman early gave himself up to a literary career, which took before long a dramatic turn, and culminated in the fabrication of popular plays, and the management of a theatre. Bonnell Thornton took waggy for his province. He had abandoned his profession of a medical man, and became an indefatigable contributor to newspapers and magazines. Most of the members are known to have been intemperate, and some were flagrantly dissolute. Two of the number, Lloyd and Bentley, were "cut off," Cowper said, "in the midst of such a life as it is frightful to reflect upon."<sup>1</sup> To Hill he said, "The tragedies of Lloyd and Bentley are both very deep. If they are not of use to the surviving part of the society, it will be their own fault."<sup>2</sup> Thornton, who survived till 1768, drank to excess; Colman was lax; and Cowper says of himself, in his *Narrative*, that he used to argue for "the truth of Scripture, when half intoxicated."<sup>3</sup> That he was no more than half may not have arisen from his moderation, for he told Newton that wine would never make him drunk.<sup>4</sup>

Hill omitted, Colman seems to have been the member of the Club that Cowper liked the best. Before Colman had taken his degree at Oxford, he and Thornton commenced a weekly journal, on the plan of the *Tatler* and its

<sup>1</sup> To Lady Hesketh, Sept. 4, 1765. Lloyd killed himself by drink. Davies's *Life of Garrick*, vol. i. p. 335.

<sup>2</sup> To Hill, July 3, 1765.

<sup>3</sup> [*Early Life*, p. 14.]

<sup>4</sup> To Newton, Sept. 8, 1783.

successors, called "The Connoisseur, by Mr. Town, Critic and Censor-General." It was doubtless through his relations with them that, on March 11th, 1756, Cowper became a contributor. The papers in the *Connoisseur* were mostly formed on a pattern rendered popular by the genius of Addison, the exposure of prevalent vices, follies, and whims, enlivened by sketches of character.<sup>1</sup> The delicious humour of Addison was of a kind which could not be reproduced. It appertained to the individual. The imitations seldom rose above vapid counterfeits; and Cowper, neglecting the original, was content to copy these secondary efforts. His opening essay is entitled, "The character of the delicate Billy Suckling," an effeminate youth who had been emasculated by the coddling of his mother, and retained in his manhood the docility and helplessness of a child. The theme was petty, and Cowper did not elicit from it the entertainment which alone could justify his choice. His second essay—"Letter from an old Bachelor, complaining of the indignities received by him from the Ladies"—is as trivial as the first. The old bachelor is the butt of ill-bred women, and the recital of the low and commonplace tricks they practise on him has nothing to recommend it.

A worthier topic was selected by him for his third essay, which is "Of keeping a Secret"; and so deeply was he impressed by his own lucubrations that he said he never divulged a secret afterwards.<sup>2</sup> He did not always desire that his friends should practise the same reserve towards him; for years later he asked Mr. Newton to pass on a confidential communication to Mrs. Unwin and himself,

<sup>1</sup> The title was a misnomer. "Connoisseur" was a term appropriated to critics on art, and had nothing to do with admonitions on the vices and follies of mankind. Boswell, in his record of Johnson's conversation, says, "I mentioned the periodical paper called the *Connoisseur*. He said it wanted matter." [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 143.] The composition throughout bears evidence of literary culture, and there are many scattered phrases of lively satire; but, had they been less intermittent, the essays in the aggregate would have been insipid from their triviality. The publication, however, had a sufficient sale to hold on for two years and three-quarters.

<sup>2</sup> To Unwin, April 6, 1780.



and urged as a reason, "No secret is less a secret for our participation in it." He who yielded to the argument was deprived of the power of sharing the boast. Cowper's paper is a feeble production. Because some men betray secrets, he would set up universal mistrust. He would not have any man confide in any other man. He would overrule the implanted sympathies which are inherent in human nature, and resolve social men into units. But there is merit as well as truth in the passage in which he remonstrates against "scourging lads into treachery." "I remember a boy," he says, "engaged in robbing an orchard who was unfortunately taken prisoner in an apple tree. Upon his absolute refusal to discover his associates, the pedagogue undertook to lash him out of his fidelity, but, finding this impossible, he at last gave him up for an obstinate villain, and sent him to his father, who told him he was ruined, and was going to disinherit him for not betraying his schoolfellows."<sup>1</sup> Six years earlier, Johnson had printed in the *Rambler* a paper on the "Duty of Secresy,"<sup>2</sup> admirable for its strength of argument and acuteness of reflection, and for a vigour of language which never deviates from the temperance of truth. Cowper's paper is in everything its opposite. His observations are feeble and meagre; and, abandoning the sobriety of nature, he carries exaggeration to extravagance. The frequent flippancy has a taint of vulgarity, and contrasts unfavourably with the weighty style of Johnson, which is sometimes over-ponderous and sententious, but always forcible, and never offends by smartness. When Cowper had outgrown the faulty tastes of his youth, there appeared in him a gentle vein of humour, which tinges and gives a zest to numerous passages in his letters. But he ripened late, and now in his twenty-fifth year, deceived by bad models, he mistook a strained, artificial vivacity for facetiousness.

The *Connoisseur* had two more papers by him. The

<sup>1</sup> [Cowper's *Works*, vol. iv. p. 378.]

<sup>2</sup> [*The Rambler*, No. 13.]

first of them was a "Letter from Mr. Village, giving an account of the present state of Country Churches, their Clergy, and their Congregations." Any expectation we might form that the details would have an historic interest is disappointed by the bald and meagre contents. He describes, with the exaggeration common to all his essays, the dilapidated condition of village churches, but does not betray the least consciousness that any of them were works of art, or exhibited more skill, contrivance, and beauty than a barn. Cowper's appreciation of nature never assisted him to understand art. For years he had the glories of Westminster Abbey, inside and out, perpetually before his eyes. The monuments he studied sedulously. "I have most of them by heart," he wrote to Newton, October 22nd, 1783. For various causes he might reasonably be interested in these defacements of the noble pile, but to the majesty of the pile itself he was insensible. He seems not to have cared for architecture of any kind.

His fifth and last contribution has for its heading, "On Conversation; the Chief Pests of Society pointed out; those who converse irrationally considered as imitating the Language of different animals." The last clause in this summary would alone suffice to tell us that the defects of the former papers went on to the end. Though all alike are written in good English, they are crude and superficial in conception, and the laboured witticisms, which were meant to redeem the slightness of the matter, are a counterfeit jocosity that has no resemblance to the spontaneous and delicate humour of his later time.

Cowper's last essay, which appeared on September 16th, 1756, was the final number of the *Connoisseur* itself, with the exception of two farewell addresses by the editors. On September 30th the work stopped. With the loss of a ready outlet for his papers, Cowper gave up composition in prose. He was then close upon twenty-five, and seven more years elapsed before he was overwhelmed by the

crisis which brought him to a lunatic asylum. Yet in this long interval of leisure, during the prime of his days, his single published piece of prose was an insignificant contribution to a trumpery magazine conducted by his friend Lloyd. The little he printed during the remaining seven years he stayed at the Temple was verse, and this was mainly translation.

I have been "a dabbler in rhyme," he says in a letter to Unwin, "ever since I was fourteen years of age, when I began with translating an elegy of Tibullus."<sup>1</sup> The dabblers are legion, and with the imitative propensity of youth, he had the stronger incentive to rhyme that his father, and his father's brother and sister, Ashley and Judith Cowper, were all three manufacturers of verse. A rhyming correspondence which he carried on with his brother was destroyed, but an "Epistle," in playful jingle, addressed to Robert Lloyd, in 1754, has survived, and may be assumed to be a sample of the rest. Sportive effusions of the kind have seldom any value either as letters or poems, and it may be inferred from the specimen that Cowper's were of this neutral description. So far as his rhymes have been identified, the earliest which appeared in print were his translation, in octosyllabic measure, of two satires of Horace. The first is that in which Horace describes his journey from Rome to Brundisium, and though it evidently purports to be humorous, the facetiousness, if it ever existed, has lost its sparkle. Cowper's version, debased by several careless lines, did little to set off his original. It is hardly more than tolerable at its best, and the second of the two, "adapted to the present times," is of the same order. They came out in Duncombe's "Horace," in 1759, and the same year he turned into English four books of Voltaire's *Henriade* for his brother, who translated four books more, and received twenty guineas for the eight from the proprietor of a

<sup>1</sup> [To Unwin, undated.]



magazine.<sup>1</sup> Translation and Magazine have both perished. Not a leaf or line of either remains, and literature, we may be sure, is none the poorer for the loss.

Of poems, not translations, Cowper composed several "half-penny ballads" of a political cast, which were printed on separate sheets, and hawked through the streets, the sellers reciting them as they went along.<sup>2</sup> He inherited the taste, he says, from his father, who was brought up in the days when party, or what their authors may have conceived to be patriotic, ballads were much in fashion; and he commended the best specimens by Prior, Congreve, and Rowe to the admiration of his son,<sup>3</sup> practised the art himself, and according to his son, "succeeded well in it." Two or three of Cowper's own "had the honour to be popular."<sup>4</sup> They had their day, and have disappeared, their popularity ceasing with the temporary interest excited by their topics.

A couple of minor poems, which the world and he had long forgotten, were discovered by him in an Annual Register lent him by Unwin, and he marked them with his initials; but, lacking the marked volume, this vague indication in one of his letters<sup>5</sup> has not been sufficient to enable his editors to detect them. The largest part of the little poetry he wrote in these years has passed out of being, and the anonymous trifles which may yet exist are not possessed of qualities to distinguish them from the

<sup>1</sup> To Lady Hesketh, Jan. 16, 1786. The translation is in the Grand Magazine and Monthly Chronicle for 1759 and 1760.

<sup>2</sup> In No. 86 of the *Connoisseur* is an account of the low functions of a person who gets a living by writing quack advertisements and dying speeches, till, dropping to the lowest employment of all, he says, "Once, indeed, being out of other business, I descended to the mean office of a ballad singer, and hawked my own verses."

<sup>3</sup> "Some written by Rowe, and I think some by Congreve," is Cowper's statement, but no political ballads of Rowe and Congreve are extant. Rowe has a sentimental song, called "Colin's Complaint," commencing, "Despairing beside a clear stream," which was rather popular when it was new. It is written in the jaunty metre which Cowper copied in his lines to Catharina, "She came,—she is gone,—we have met," and in one or two other pieces.

<sup>4</sup> To Unwin, Aug. 4, 1783; to Newton, Dec. 4, 1781.

<sup>5</sup> [To Unwin, undated, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 356.]

ephemeral verses of contemporaries. Not one of them, in his own judgment, was worthy of preservation, for, when he inserted every occasional piece which was tolerable in his future volumes, he admitted none of the productions he composed at the Temple. All the early attempts which are known to be his, the translation of the Satires of Horace excepted, were printed after his death from manuscripts treasured by others.

Love, Dryden said, made every man, if not a poet, at least a rhymers.<sup>1</sup> It only made Cowper the last. The very rhymers, in the literal sense of the word, was sadly deficient. In the course of only nine stanzas which he penned on "Himself," he couples the words, *spirit, bear it ; had, said ; perter, smarter ; do, so ; shapes, relapse ; foolish, polish*. When he was twenty-eight, he was still content with such similarity of sound as can be extracted out of *rhetoric, Greek ; coarse, worse ; steer, care ; go, you ; near, character*. Without spirit or polish, sterling matter or happy execution, the verses of Cowper seemed to indicate that, whatever else he might become, he could never be a poet. The one piece which gave some promise of excellence, and this in its composition only, is the earliest of the whole—the lines he wrote at Bath, in his seventeenth year, "On finding the heel of a shoe." They are noticeable for exhibiting, in conjunction with considerable force of diction, the precise form of blank verse, and turn of expression, which he adopted in the mock heroic passages of the Task.

Churchill was born in the same year with Cowper, and they were schoolfellows in the same form at Westminster. He claims a place in Cowper's literary history from having exercised an influence on the style of his rhyming verse.

<sup>1</sup> Hayley quotes Cowper's own lines—

The poet's lyre, to fix his fame,  
Should be the poet's heart :  
Affection lights a brighter flame  
Than ever blazed by art.

Churchill suddenly sprung into fame during Cowper's last years at the Temple, and numbered him among his warmest admirers. In March, 1761, appeared the *Rosciad*, and a rapid succession of pungent or acrimonious pieces kept his name continuously before a public fond of detraction. Exaggeration carried to absurdity is a usual property of his poems, justness of thought being foreign to his undisciplined temperament. The talent which recommended his unscrupulous caricature and hyperbolical extravagances to popular favour was a command of vigorous language. His verse flowed on with a continuous energy of expression, which no decorum restricted, and which was relished for its intemperance. He was destitute of poetic fancy and sentiment, and Cowper admits that his diction was "slovenly" and "coarse."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, when his interest in literature revived at Olney he continued to esteem him. He went through the entire series of his poems, and said, in an undated letter to Unwin, "It is a great thing to be indeed a poet, and does not happen to more than one man in a century. Churchill, the great Churchill, deserved the name of a poet. I have read him twice, and some of his pieces three times over, and the last time with more pleasure than the first."<sup>2</sup> The praise was excessive, and was the less to be expected that the licentiousness of Churchill's life, and his misuse of his talents, would have been abhorrent to Cowper in any other author, when he penned this eulogium. But he had formed his opinion at the Temple, when his combined prejudices were in Churchill's favour, and he read him later through the medium of his original prepossessions.

In the four years from 1759 there is no mention of Cowper having written either verse or prose. There is no record that he did anything more than beguile the time. For a man whose inclinations were turned towards literature, prose and poetry combined were, in quantity and quality, a meagre stock to have produced at

<sup>1</sup> *Table Talk*, v. 682.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. iii. p. 350.



the age of thirty-two, when he concluded his stay at the Temple. After his name was established, he told Lady Hesketh why it was that his preliminary efforts had been few. He had, he said, "an infinite share of ambition," with "an equal share of diffidence." "He who seeks distinction must be sensible of disapprobation, exactly in the same proportion as he desires applause," and he believed that, up to fifty, his dread of censure had overborne his eagerness for fame.<sup>1</sup> But this was not the main cause of his delay in putting forward his claim. While he lived in the Temple, he did not abstain from anonymous trials of his skill, and he might have continued the method without risking his credit. That he did not is explained by the slender encouragment he received. The street popularity of one or two half-penny ballads was the trifle of a day. The rest of his pieces, prose and poetry, must have fallen dead. With a resolute temperament, his bias to literature, and his passion for celebrity, would have led him to improve on his small beginnings. But the stimulus of success was indispensable to counteract his deficient energy, and his insignificant ventures passing unheeded, he laid aside altogether his lazy pen. In judging these years by what he did not do, he overlooked what he accomplished. Though not yet an author of promise, he had insensibly fitted himself to become an author of genius. The circumstances of his life were to supply the materials which suited his poetic vein, and his youthful reading, matured long afterwards in the act of recalling it by the natural advance of his understanding, educated him in the arts by which his ideas were to be clothed in immortal verse.

<sup>1</sup> To Lady Hesketh, May 15, 1786.

## CHAPTER IV

THE whole of Cowper's legal earnings proceeded from the office of Commissioner of Bankrupts, which he held for some years, and which was worth about sixty pounds per annum.<sup>1</sup> "The duties," says Mr. Bruce, "were for the most part of a formal character, and were executed by the Commissioners not singly, but as a body, and in all matters of difficulty under the direction of a Chief Commissioner."<sup>2</sup> Beyond the salary attached to this practical sinecure, Cowper had no other income than the interest from his moderate inheritance. Salary and interest combined did not balance his expenditure, and he went on diminishing the capital to supply the annual deficiency. "I was never," he wrote to Newton, "much addicted to anxious thoughts about the future in respect of temporals";<sup>3</sup> and to Lady Hesketh he said, "Though in my time my rest has been broken by many things, it never was yet by the desire of riches, or the dread of poverty."<sup>4</sup> The victim of nervous anxieties on much slighter occasions, no trait in his character was more marked than his disregard of pecuniary cares. He was heedless to recklessness. His advance towards poverty did not induce him to suspend his frivolous indulgences or make an effort to improve his income by working. A certain impotence of mind, a consciousness of incapacity for the settled work of his profession, or for any other steady and remunerative

<sup>1</sup> Cowper's father was *clerk* to the Commissioners of Bankruptcy. "William Cowper, Esq., and the Rev. Mr. John Cowper, Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Rector of Great Berkhamstead, in the County of Hereford, are appointed Clerks of the Commissioners of Bankruptcy."—Quoted by Thackeray, in his *Lectures on the Four Georges*, p. 94, from some Annual Diary of Events of the year 1731. The right of appointing to offices, and the qualifications for the discharge of their duties, were, in the eighteenth century, often widely at variance with our ideas

<sup>2</sup> *Memoir of Cowper, Poetical Works*, vol. i. p. xxxi.

<sup>3</sup> To Newton, June 25, 1785.      <sup>4</sup> To Lady Hesketh, Sept. 13, 1788.

calling, kept him from reproaching himself with his aimless, self-indulgent existence.

Cowper has told in his Narrative the view he took of his situation towards the end of 1762. "By this time, my patrimony being well-nigh spent, and there being no appearance that I should ever repair the damage by a fortune of my own getting, I began to be a little apprehensive of approaching want."<sup>1</sup> How slight was his alarm at the prospect may be seen in a letter he wrote at this conjuncture to Mr. Rowley. "My resolution is never to be melancholy while I have a hundred pounds in the world to keep up my spirits. God knows how long that will be; but in the mean time *Io Triumphe!* If a great man struggling with misfortune is a noble object, a little man that despises them is no contemptible one; and this is all the philosophy I have in the world at present." The philosophy consisted in enjoying the present shining hour, professing that poverty was preferable to toil. The latter half of his doctrine is plainly avowed in what follows. "There is nothing more certain than that every man may be rich if he will. But this provokes me, that a covetous dog who will work by candlelight in a morning, to get what he does not want, shall be praised for his thriftiness, while a gentleman shall be abused for submitting to his wants, rather than work like an ass to relieve them."<sup>2</sup> Cowper said of his philosophy that it savoured "pretty much of the ancient store," which it did in his form of stating it, but he applied it in a manner which savoured more of the Epicurean.

His stoicism wavered, and did not permit him to be entirely easy in the anticipation of the sudden drop from comfort to penury. "It was, I imagine," he writes in his Narrative, "under some apprehensions of this kind, that I one day said to a friend of mine, 'If the clerk to the journals of the House of Lords should die, I had some hopes that my kinsman, who had the place in his disposal,

<sup>1</sup> [*Early Life*, p. 15.]

<sup>2</sup> To Mr. Rowley, 1762.



would appoint me to succeed him.' We both agreed that the business of the place, being transacted in private, would exactly suit me, and both expressed an earnest wish for his death, that I might be provided for. Thus did I covet what God had commanded me not to covet; and involved myself still deeper in guilt by doing it in the spirit of a murderer." He was stern in denouncing the frailties of his undisciplined years, and we have the evidence of his kindly disposition that his wish was more unreflecting than murderous, but there is no reason to doubt that he wished at the moment that the course of nature would kindly do for him what he would not have done for himself.

The clerk presently died from other causes than this wish, and Cowper obtained his "heart's desire," and "with it," he says, "an immediate punishment for his crime." Not, we may be sure, for the punishment of an inconsiderate thought, did a train of miseries ensue that would be out of all proportion to the offence, but for the happy effects of which these miseries were the parent, effects which called forth Cowper's liveliest gratitude, and which he esteemed the crowning blessing of his life.

"Not only did the clerkship of the journals become vacant," says Cowper in his Narrative, "but it became necessary to appoint officers to two other places. These were the office of reading clerk, and the clerkship of the committees, of much greater value than that of the journals." The three clerkships were the patent right of his cousin and intimate friend, Major Cowper. The Major offered him the two most lucrative of these offices. He accepted the "splendid proposal"; and, in his own language, "at the same time seemed to receive a dagger in his heart."<sup>1</sup> The stab came from no more momentous cause than the recollection that the duties, though almost mechanical, were discharged in public. However much he was at

<sup>1</sup> [*Early Life*, pp. 15-17.]

home with his facetious and jovial companions, they had not helped to banish his native shyness. Many years afterwards, on warning Mr. Rose against the "vicious fear" which had proved his own ruin, he told him that the mingling with men of pleasure would not cure it, but would rather increase it in more sober society.<sup>1</sup> The men of pleasure drove away shyness from their presence by a forward style of talk, untrammelled by ceremony, and Cowper, missing in more frigid and decorous circles the encouraging heartiness of manner and familiarity of speech, had his ordinary timidity increased by the contrast. The bashfulness inherent in his disposition had been aggravated by the disease which shook his understanding ten years before. The notion of doing anything, however easy, where there were ears to hear and eyes to behold him, was quite intolerable, and, after spending a week in torment, he prevailed on his kinsman to allow him to relinquish his two appointments for the worst of the three posts, which, if less profitable, was more private.

His satisfaction at the change was of short duration. A party among the Peers questioned the Major's right of nomination, and determined at any rate to harass his candidates by a searching examination into their qualifications at the bar of the House. "I knew," said Cowper, "to demonstration, that upon these terms the clerkship of the journals was no place for me. They whose spirits are formed like mine, to whom a public exhibition of themselves, on any occasion, is mortal poison, may have some idea of the horrors of my situation; others can have none." While feeling it impossible to face the ordeal, it seemed equally impossible to give up competence for poverty, and brave the censure and contempt of his friends. The conflicting emotions brought on a fever. With an enfeebled body, and a mind upon the rack, he attended daily for upwards of six months at the clerk's office, to acquire the necessary information, and all

<sup>1</sup> To Rose, Sept. 11, 1788.

this time he turned over the leaves of the journals without any comprehension of what he read. That he should have submitted to a torture, as useless as it was protracted, was the necessary consequence of his being just as impotent to fly as to combat.

The vacation arrived, and amid the pleasures of Margate he managed to shut out the alarming prospect from his view. But when October saw him again in London, with the day of trial drawing near, his misery returned with redoubled violence. Lifting up his eyes to heaven, in a spirit of rancorous reproach against his Maker, he cursed aloud the hour of his birth. He had a foreboding that insanity was impending, and ardently desired it, that it might relieve him from his dilemma. His apprehension that it would not seize him in time seemed likely to be verified. The dreadful ordeal approached, and he was still in his senses. He therefore turned his thoughts to self-destruction as his sole remaining resource. In his happier hours the idea of death had made him shudder. He now welcomed it as a deliverance from a more agonising fear. He easily persuaded himself that what he desired was lawful, or, allowing it to be criminal, that the torments of hell would be more endurable than his present distress. On two occasions at taverns he got into a conversation with a total stranger upon suicide. Each of these persons agreed that it was one of the rights of man to live on or to die at his own discretion. Cowper had doubtless introduced the topic, and given the tone to the argument. What with him had a real and frightful meaning, was nothing more with his chance companions than idle babble. He considered it nevertheless decisive of the question, that he should have met with an independent concurrence of sentiment in a couple of lax talkers, who, unprincipled as they were, would have shrunk from the responsibility of advising him to destroy himself, if they had known that he was about to act upon their opinions. His scruples removed, he determined to be in



readiness, and one evening in November purchased half an ounce of laudanum.

He was now within a week of the period when he was to appear at the bar of the House of Lords. That he might not lose the chance of any turn of events in his favour, he resolved to put off drinking the poison till the very last moment. In proportion as the thoughts of a man are fixed upon himself, he is apt to imagine that others are thinking of him likewise. In insanity there is often an intensity of personal consciousness which makes its victim fancy that he is the object of allusions which have not the remotest connection with him. The morning before the day which was to decide his fate, Cowper read in a newspaper a letter which he was convinced was a satire upon himself, and designed by the writer to goad him on to self-destruction. "Your cruelty," he inwardly exclaimed, "shall be gratified ; you shall have your revenge !" Flinging down the journal in a passion, he rushed out of the coffee-room and made his way to the fields with the intention of committing suicide in some retired ditch. When the moment arrived to die, his purpose wavered, and the idea struck him that he might hide his head abroad, and thus get rid of the whole of his perplexities. He would sell what he had in the funds, and, when his money was spent, he could change his religion, and obtain an asylum in a monastery. He hastened to his chambers, and commenced packing up his portmanteau. Action, in his infirm and tumultuous state of mind, at once produced vacillation. Again suicide appeared the preferable plan, and this time he resolved to perish by drowning. He got into a coach, and drove to a frequented part of the river. The water was low, and a porter was sitting upon some goods on the bank. The least check sufficed to turn him from a design which he feared to execute. He went back to the coach, drew up the shutters, and made an attempt to drink off his laudanum. The mere effort filled him with terror, and

his whole body shook with a convulsive agitation. "Distracted," he says, "between the desire of death and the dread of it, twenty times I had the phial to my mouth, and as often received an irresistible check; it seemed to me that an invisible hand swayed the bottle downwards, as often as I set it against my lips." Unable to conquer the fear which was the cause of the phenomenon, he alighted at the Temple, and repeated the experiment in his own apartment. Filled with disdain at his "pitiful timidity," he put forth his hand towards the laudanum with "the most confirmed resolution." His fingers suddenly contracted in the effort, and this, which was the effect of the terror always renewed at the critical moment, appeared to him to have "the air of a divine interposition." He stopped to muse upon the incident. He ended by being convinced that suicide was a crime, and in a fury of indignation threw his laudanum out of the window.

His mind oscillated from death to life, and from life back to death. His scruples of conscience had no sooner served the purpose of staying execution, than the opposite evils were again in the ascendant, and he returned to the conclusion that self-destruction was his only means of deliverance. He sat brooding in his chamber the remainder of the day without making any fresh attempt to destroy himself, but when he went to bed it was with the resolution not to see the morning light. He fell asleep, woke at three o'clock, immediately got his penknife, and for two or three hours kept it directed to his heart. The point was broken off, and when he occasionally pressed upon it, as he thought with all his might, but evidently with nerveless indecision, it did not enter the flesh. Day dawned, and the hour was at hand when a friend was to call and accompany him to Westminster. The approach of the dreaded minute infused into him an energy that he had not known before. He fastened his garter to an iron pin at the top of the bed-post, and attempted to hang

himself. The pin bent with his weight, and his halter slipped off. He tied it next to the frame of the tester, which instantly snapped short. He then formed a loop at the opposite end of his garter, threw it over the top corner of his half-open door, and, pushing away the chair upon which he stood, hung till he was unconscious. The garter broke before life was extinct, and he fell upon the floor. Hearing his own dreadful groans as sensibility began to return, he thought himself in hell. In a few seconds he realised his situation, and staggered back to bed. Presently his laundress came to light the fire. He sent for his patron, pointed to the garter, and related to him what had occurred. The Major replied, "You terrify me! To be sure you cannot hold the office at this rate." He carried away with him the form of appointment, and Cowper was relieved of the horrible phantom which day and night had affrighted him for months, and driven him to these mournful attempts at suicide.

The trial at an end which had induced him to seek a refuge in the grave, his mind instantly reverted to the guilt of the proceeding. From the sin of self-destruction he was led to reflect upon the other transgressions of his life. His time, since his illness in 1753, had been passed by his own account in that "uninterrupted course of sinful indulgence" which he concluded would be for his mind's health when he burnt his prayers. His conscience sometimes pricked him, but his usual remedy was to banish thought. Averse as he was to the practice of Christianity, he retained a hesitating, theoretical belief. His latent principles were roused if he "heard the Gospel blasphemed"; and he would argue vehemently in its favour with his infidel companions. A deistical friend once cut short the disputation by alleging that, if what he said was true, he would by his own showing be certainly damned. He had the conviction that this presage was about to be fulfilled. The terrors which assailed him were as great as when the examination was impending; they



had merely changed their direction, and the belief that he had incurred the wrath of the Almighty overwhelmed him with misery. He conceived the idea that when the Saviour pronounced a curse upon the barren fig-tree, He had him in His mind. He took up a volume of Beaumont and Fletcher, and immediately caught his eye upon the words, "The justice of the gods is in it." He inwardly exclaimed, "It is of a truth." He could hardly open a book without the first sentence upon which he lighted appearing to be some express condemnation of himself. He bought a ballad that a man was singing in the street, because he believed that he was the subject of it. He imagined the people stared and laughed at him, and that his acquaintances either avoided him or spoke to him in scorn. If anything diverted his attention for an instant from his despairing ideas, a flash, he says, from hell was darted into his heart, and the question was forced upon him, "What are these things to me who am damned?" He soon inferred that he had been guilty of the unpardonable sin by his "neglect to improve the mercies of God at Southampton." Two circumstances confirmed the impression. In a reverie between waking and sleeping, he fancied that the iron gate of the choir of Westminster Abbey was flung violently in his face as he was about to enter to attend the prayers. "A sentence," he says, "of excommunication from all the churches upon the earth could not have been so dreadful to me, as the interpretation which I could not avoid putting upon this dream." The other evil prognostication grew out of an effort to repeat the Creed for the purpose of testing his faith. Such an experiment, to a man with his mind overthrown, and in the depths of religious despondency, was sure to agitate him to the centre. When he reached the second sentence, the first was obliterated from his memory. He endeavoured to recover it, and just as he was about to succeed, a tremulous sensation in the fibres of his brain defeated the attempt. He was thrown into agony by the

omen. He made another trial, and the effect was precisely the same. He no longer doubted that it was a supernatural interposition to inform him that he had no part whatever in the truths expressed in the Creed. His desperation was complete. His knees knocked against each other, and he howled "with horror." He had a sensation like that of real fire in his heart, and he concluded that it was meant to be a token and a foretaste of the eternal flames. He composed some Sapphics, in which he describes himself as "more abhorred than Judas"; and, while exclaiming that hatred and vengeance are waiting with impatience to seize his soul, he deems it an aggravation of his lot that hell is bolted against him lest it should afford him some shelter from his miseries.<sup>1</sup>

In this deplorable condition he remembered his cousin, Martin Madan,<sup>2</sup> an evangelical clergyman, whom he had hitherto thought an enthusiast, and to whom he now turned as his best hope of relief. Madan proved to him from the Bible that Jesus Christ was a Sacrifice for sin, and Cowper gathered a gleam of comfort from a doctrine which he instantly saw was adapted to his case, though he questioned whether the pardon purchased for others would

<sup>1</sup> The fourth stanza concludes with the lines—

I'm called, if vanquished, to receive a sentence  
Worse than Abiram's;

and the expression, "if vanquished," was pronounced by Southey to be evidently a mistake. "He did not," Mr. Willmott justly remarks, "remember the history in the sixteenth chapter of Numbers, where Dathan and Abiram, the leaders of a rebellion against Moses, are resolved to abide the consequences of it. Accordingly they were vanquished, and the opening of the earth was the result of the defeat." Cowper thought their fate preferable to his own, because they were engulfed at once; while of himself he says—

I, fed with judgment, in a fleshly tomb, am  
Buried above ground.

Southey supposed that "*fed* with judgment" was another corruption, from his not being aware of the phraseology of the Bible—"I will feed them with judgment" (Ezek. xxxiv. 16).

<sup>2</sup> There was a double connection between him and the poet. Cowper's aunt, Judith Cowper, married Colonel Madan, the father of Martin, and Martin's sister married her cousin, Major Cowper, whose kindly patronage had produced the present catastrophe.

be extended to him. Up to this time, he says, "I was as much unacquainted with the Redeemer in all His saving offices as if His Name had never reached me." He was revolving the subject with comparative calmness when a fresh attack supervened. The anxieties of his mind had begun by disordering his brain. The process was now reversed, and the increase of the physical malady brought back his mental alarms. He was in that state in which

Nature breeds

Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,  
Abominable, inutterable, and worse  
Than fables yet have feign'd or fear conceived.<sup>1</sup>

The character which these chimæras assumed was determined by the predominant direction of his thoughts. He awoke one morning with the sound of torments ringing in his ears. "Satan," he says, "plied me close with horrible visions, and more horrible voices." As he walked up and down his room in dismay, expecting the earth to open and swallow him up, a horrible darkness came over him, and with it a sensation of a heavy blow within his head. He cried out with the pain, his expressions grew confused, and it became evident to his friends that he was too far gone to be at large. He had a slight acquaintance with an amiable physician, who kept a private asylum at St. Alban's, and to whom he paid in later years the graceful compliment of designating him as

Cotton, whose humanity sheds rays  
That make superior skill his second praise.<sup>2</sup>

The unhappy patient was placed under his care on the 7th of December, and afterwards reckoned it a special instance of the Providence which attended him throughout, that he should have fallen into such beneficent hands, instead of being consigned to some London practitioner.<sup>3</sup>

Cowper dated his madness from the moment when he felt as if he had received a blow upon his brain. As long

<sup>1</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, book ii.

<sup>2</sup> *Hope*.

<sup>3</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, July 4, 1765.]



as his thoughts remained coherent, he seems to have considered himself sane. In the midst of the wild disarray of his ideas, his conviction of the terrible nature of his sins, and his expectation of instant judgment, continued clear and uninterrupted. Five months were spent in this awful delusion. By long familiarity with the prospect, he began to grow indifferent to it. He determined that, pending the execution of the sentence, he would endeavour to enjoy himself. He laughed at the stories of Dr. Cotton, and told him some of his own to match them. It was now that he regretted that he had not indulged his appetites more freely, and envied those miserable spirits who had run the round of sensuality before they met the just retribution of their deeds. Notwithstanding that these notions savoured of insanity, and that he retained his belief in his dreadful doom, his inclination towards cheerfulness was the turning point in his malady.

This second and milder stage of the disorder had lasted nearly three months, when he was visited, July 25, 1764, by his only and much-loved brother, who was a fellow of Benet College,<sup>1</sup> Cambridge. Cowper gave vent to the fixed idea of his mind,—his expectation of sudden judgment. His brother protested that the whole was a delusion. The vehemence with which he spoke arrested the attention of the poor patient, who, bursting into tears, exclaimed, "If it be a delusion, then am I the happiest of beings!" Hour by hour his hope increased. His visions that night were pleasing instead of gloomy, and at breakfast next morning he had a growing conviction that the decree of condemnation was not irrevocable. For weeks he had never opened the Bible. His reviving spirits induced him to take it up, and the first verse which met his eye was the 25th of the 3rd of Romans,—“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of

<sup>1</sup> [Corpus Christi College, so called from its proximity to St. Benedict's Church.]

sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." In the crisis of his disorder he would have thought that he was specially excepted from the blessing. His reason having returned, he did not hesitate to take the doctrine to himself. "Unless," he says, "the Almighty arm had been under me, I think I should have died with gratitude and joy. My eyes filled with tears, and my voice choked with transport. I could only look up to heaven in silent fear, overwhelmed with love and wonder." It might be inferred, both from Cowper's letters and poetry, that, apart from his insanity, his temperament was tranquil, and that a composed cheerfulness was more congenial to him than the ebullitions of enthusiasm. It was entirely otherwise. The sudden rebound from months of agonising despair to unclouded happiness produced the utmost violence of transport. Dr. Cotton was alarmed lest it should terminate in a fatal frenzy. But the ecstasies of joy are more transient than the visitations of pain, and the danger from this source was not of long duration. Yet an unusual exultation animated him for weeks. If he did but mention the name of the Redeemer, tears of thanksgiving were ready to run down his cheeks. He was too elated to sleep much, and grudged every hour spent in slumber. "To rejoice," he says, "day and night was all my employment." He celebrated the mercy which had visited him in a hymn entitled "The Happy Change." It was not in the pride of authorship that he wrote. He tells us that, when his passions were roused, he had always recourse to verse, as the only adequate vehicle for his impetuous thoughts. To keep silence was impossible, and no prose which was not inflated could, in his own opinion, have done justice to his conceptions.

The Personal Narrative of Cowper is a complete refutation of the popular notion that religion made him mad.<sup>1</sup> Both his attacks arose from causes that had no

<sup>1</sup> "Religion rarely produces insanity, but constantly colours it."—*Insanity*, by George H. Savage, p. 159.

connection with it, and when the subject engaged no part of his attention. In the first visitation it was only after the disease had taken root that he sought relief from prayer, which he abandoned the moment his health was restored. In the second and more terrible concussion of his mind it was not till his frenzy had driven him to attempt suicide that his conscience took alarm, and diverted his attention from what would equally have fed the disease—the ruin of his prospects, his personal disgrace, the censure, or worse, the compassion of his friends. Being already insane when he commenced the review of his past life, he saw it of necessity through the distorting medium of a disordered imagination. Rational for the most part as were his conceptions of Christianity, he may even, when he was convalescent, have overrated the enormity of some of his actions. But his testimony to facts must not be confounded with the interpretation he put upon them. Although his judgments in one or two particulars may have been erroneous, his statements of what he really did and thought bear the stamp of scrupulous fidelity, and, if their accuracy is admitted, he did not err in concluding that his general conduct called for bitter repentance. He had not, indeed, lived a life of open profligacy, but he had passed his days in self-indulgence, and in the total neglect of religion. He had entirely abandoned the practice of devotion, and seems not to have believed in its efficacy. When, subsequent to his conversion, he told his friend Hill that he could only return his kindness by prayers, he added, "If you should smile or ever laugh at my conclusion, I should not be angry, though I should be grieved. It is not long since I should have laughed at such a recompense myself."<sup>1</sup> In a word, while professing a belief in Christianity, he held it folly to pay in practice any allegiance to the Creator. "I thought," he says, "the service of my Maker and Redeemer an unnecessary labour; I despised those

<sup>1</sup> [To Hill, Nov. 5, 1772.]



who thought otherwise ; and if they spoke of the love of God I pronounced them madmen.<sup>1</sup> Unquestionably many of his former acquaintances now pronounced the same verdict upon him, with the specious addition that they would urge the fact that he had been insane for a triumphant proof that his religion was insanity. He anticipated this result, and "was concerned to reflect that a convert made in Bedlam was more likely to be a stumbling-block to others than to advance their faith."<sup>2</sup> The manner, however, in which he had acquired a knowledge of himself and the Gospel could not affect the truth of his conclusions, and he might well be thankful for any dispensation which enabled him, after living without God in the world,

To see, by no fallacious light or dim,  
Earth made for man, and man himself for Him.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Southey throughout held the view that Cowper's description of his life was exaggerated. In a letter written to Lady Hesketh, August 9, 1763, at the time when he was going through the sorrowful form of preparing for his examination at the bar of the House of Lords, the sentence occurs, "O ! my good cousin ! if I was to open my heart to you, I could show you strange sights ; nothing, I flatter myself, that would shock you, but a great deal that would make you wonder. I am of a very singular temper, and very unlike all the men that I have ever conversed with. Certainly I am not an absolute fool ; but I have more weakness than the greatest of all the fools I can recollect at present." Upon this Southey makes the following comment: "There was nothing in his heart which would have shocked the most tender of his friends, if its secrets had been disclosed ; this was the fair testimony which he gave, when capable of giving it ; but there was a want of that peace which passeth all understanding." Now this letter was written when he was overwhelmed with the dread of having to pass an examination. This "weakness" was the "strange sight" he had in his mind. His life in its religious aspect was not in his thoughts at all. A different subject had exclusive possession of him. How far he was capable of giving any "fair testimony" as to what ought to "shock" may be judged from the circumstance that he penned the words at the period when he was persuaded that a man was mad who spoke of loving God.

<sup>2</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, July 4, 1761.]

<sup>3</sup> *Retirement.*

## [CHAPTER V]

COWPER remained nearly a year at St. Alban's after his disorder abated. In Dr. Cotton he had a friend who loved Christianity, and who was as well qualified to afford assistance in this department "as in that which was more immediately his province." Every morning the physician conversed with his patient upon what was now the absorbing topic of his thoughts. He was consequently happy in his retreat, and a nature less sensitive than his might have shrunk from reappearing in the world. The expense alone induced him to quit what he called "the place of his second nativity," and which he ever after associated with his joyful recovery, and not with its wretched antecedents. He wished on removing to fix his residence near Cambridge, that he might share the society of his brother, and he was, at any rate, resolved that he would appear no more in London, "the scene of his former abominations." The painful recollections connected with it, the awkwardness of meeting his old companions, his determination to shake off the greater part of them, and the impossibility of pursuing his profession, all combined to turn him from his previous haunts. He resigned the small office of Commissioner of Bankrupts for the double reason that it required his presence in town, and that his ignorance of law would not permit him, now he weighed the words to which he swore, to take the customary oath. The scanty income which remained would have been insufficient for his maintenance if his relations had not clubbed together a little later to make him an allowance.<sup>1</sup> The frightful proofs he had given of the desperate nature of his malady left them no room to blame him.

<sup>1</sup> He was cool in accepting charity. He says to Hill, Nov. 14, 1772, "My situation in life is comfortable; my friends would wish it to be so." Probably he thought his incapacity to earn money a visitation of Providence, and therefore blameless. And his friends were well to do.

His brother could find him no convenient lodgings nearer than Huntingdon. Thither Cowper set out on the 17th June, 1765, his heart aching at the thought of returning to a world in the pollutions of which he had had so "sad a share," and dreading lest his ears, as he journeyed, should be offended by oaths, which were the common language of the time. He took Cambridge by the way. He arrived at his new abode on the 22nd, and his spirits sank when he found himself alone in a strange place without a friend to comfort him. He walked a mile from the town, and, kneeling down in a screened nook of a field, prayed that he might be cheered and supported. He returned to his lodgings light in heart. The next day was Sunday. Entering the church with feelings different from what he had ever entered a church before, he could with difficulty restrain his emotions. His heart warmed to all the congregation; and observing that a man who sat in the pew with him was singing with much devotion, he inwardly exclaimed, "Bless you for praising Him whom my soul loveth!" A vivid and beautiful picture which almost reproduces the impressions he describes!<sup>1</sup>

He had very uncomfortable expectations of the accommodation he should meet with at Huntingdon, and found to his surprise that he liked his lodgings, the locality, and the people. He thought the town among the neatest in England. Cobbett was of the same opinion. In his *Rural Rides* he calls it "one of those pretty, clean, unstenched, unconfined places that tend to lengthen life and make it happy." Of the neighbouring country he had no good to tell—"few trees and those scrubbed, few woods and those small, few hills and those hardly worthy of the name"; but the immediate environs he admired to enthusiasm. "Above and below the bridge are the most beautiful, and by far the most beautiful, meadows that I ever saw in my life. Here are no reeds, here is no sedge, no unevennesses of any sort. Here are *bowling-*

<sup>1</sup> [*Early Life*, pp. 70-78.]



*greens* of hundreds of acres in extent, with a river winding through them full to the brink. I think it would be difficult to find a more delightful spot than this in the world.”<sup>1</sup> The description of Cowper, written a year and a half after he had settled there, is as picture-like, but much less flattering. “My lot is cast in a country where we have neither woods, nor commons, nor pleasant prospects; all is flat and insipid; in the summer adorned only with blue willows, and in the winter covered with a flood. Such it is at present: our bridges shaken almost in pieces, our poor willows torn away by the roots, and our haycocks almost afloat.”<sup>2</sup> Cobbett painted the view as he saw it in June, Cowper in a dreary January, and we must allow for the different impressions produced by sunshine and verdure, and by a watery landscape beneath an overcast sky. Yet it is curious that the coarse, vituperative demagogue, though he too, callous as he was, had a heart for nature, should have discriminated a beauty, real of its kind, which was lost upon the nicer eyes of the poet. Not that he could have lacked scenes to satisfy his sympathies. Indeed, he had said in an earlier letter that the country was fine for several miles round.<sup>3</sup> If the true admirer of what is lovely in creation has not the pleasure of general prospects, his attention is only turned more intently to individual features, and he frequently derives a greater gratification from this close acquaintance with humble beauties than from more pretending and extended views.

Cowper possessed, in an unusual degree, the happy art of detecting charms in spots the least adorned “with sweet nature’s grace.” Without the robustness and hardihood which belongs to frequenters of the country who luxuriate in its outdoor prospects and pursuits, the fascination nature had for him was extreme. He was not an ordinary lover of it, but a rapturous devotee. The taste

<sup>1</sup> [Cobbett’s *Rural Rides*, ed. 1853, pp. 81, 82.]

<sup>2</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, Jan. 30, 1767.]

<sup>3</sup> [To Major Cowper, Oct. 18, 1765.]

was worked into him in childhood, and the twenty-three years he had spent at Westminster and in London had not weaned him from its attractions, nor reconciled him to the rival pleasures of a town. He says in his *Task* that he had never framed a wish that flattered him with hopes of earthly bliss, but that it was in the country he laid the scene. No bard in his schooldays could please him unless his lyre was tuned to nature's praises. For this he was never weary of the Pastorals of Virgil; for this, at fourteen, he danced with joy over the beauties of *Paradise Lost*; for this he studied and revered Cowley, enamoured of the life that the poet loved. The pictures of his waking fancy, his very nightly dreams, the first efforts of his Muse, all were rural.<sup>1</sup>

These were the literary emanations of his passion. His acts corresponded to them. His thirst for meadows and streams tempted him to break bounds at Westminster, that he might enjoy a stroll on the banks of the Thames. In holiday times at Berkhamstead, the charms which, in his wanderings, kept opening on his view, enticed him onwards till, his pocket provisions exhausted, and hungry and penniless and far from home, he was reduced to feed on hips and haws, blackberries and sloes. He had not the incentive of rural sports in his rambles. There is no intimation in his letters or poems that he ever fished, shot, or hunted. The common, familiar appearances everywhere present were enough of themselves to fill a mind never sated with their perennial beauties. "Everything I see in the fields," he said, "is to me an object, and I can look at the same rivulet, or at a handsome tree, every day of my life, with new pleasure. This indeed is partly the effect of a natural taste for rural beauty, and partly the effect of habit; for I never in all my life have let slip the opportunity of breathing fresh air, and of conversing with nature, when I could fairly catch it."<sup>2</sup>

The gratification of his sense of smell came to complete

<sup>1</sup> *The Task*, book iv. lines 695-730.

<sup>2</sup> To Unwin, Nov. 10, 1783.

the round of his country delights. Besides the sweetness of the air on favoured days, he had a keen appreciation of the special fragrance of particular localities. Lady Hesketh referred in a letter to his strong partiality for commons on this account, and reminded him of some manifestation of the characteristic, years before, when they were rambling together in the neighbourhood of Southampton. "My nostrils," he wrote in reply, "have hardly been regaled with those wild odours from that day to the present. We have no such here. But we have a scent in the fields about Olney that to me is equally agreeable." He had "a strong poetical desire" to describe this scent in the *Task*, but desisted from the apprehension that it would be thought a peculiarity of his constitution or downright fiction.<sup>1</sup> In saying that his desire to describe it was "poetical," he revealed the nature of his sensations, as belonging to that higher order of perceptions which realised the world of wonder and beauty underlying the outward aspect of things. A single homely bit of landscape was sufficient for his desires, if combined with quiet; and, whatever might be the merits of the environs of Huntingdon when contrasted with other rural districts, they were elysium in comparison with Fleet Street and the Strand.

He dreaded the idea of having new acquaintances to make, with no other recommendation than that of being a perfect stranger, and hoped that none of the inhabitants would take the least notice of him.<sup>2</sup> A patient fresh from a lunatic asylum, who came to reside in a town where he was totally unknown, and with which he had no sort of connection, could not be the subject of speculations which it would be comfortable to contemplate. This view, however, of the question does not appear to have troubled him, for his insanity was never a painful topic. He looked at it through the light of the blessing he had derived from it, and chiefly thought of it as the means by which he had

<sup>1</sup> To Lady Hesketh, Dec. 6, 1875.

<sup>2</sup> [To Major Cowper, Oct. 18, 1765.]



been delivered from a worse madness. On the occasion of his paying a visit, in 1768, to his friendly physician at St. Alban's, he said that he visited it every day in thought, and that the recollection of what occurred there, and the consequences which ensued from it, made all the other circumstances of life appear insipid and un-affecting.<sup>1</sup> It was not as a person who had been disordered in his intellect, but as a character to be suspected, that he feared the unfavourable comments of the Huntingdon gossips. It hurt his pride, when he became familiarly known in the place, that some people had spoken of him as "*That fellow Cowper*";<sup>2</sup> and, with the secret motive of furnishing ocular demonstration of the splendour of his connections, he introduced young Unwin to his old patron the Major. At first his desire to be let alone appeared likely to be realised. He had been eleven days at Huntingdon when he wrote to Hill, "I have received but one visit since here I came. I don't mean that I have refused any, but that only one has been offered."<sup>3</sup> This single intruder was his woollen-draper, whose motives may be supposed to have been as much commercial as friendly. By degrees the aristocracy of the place dropped in, and in a couple of months he knew all the "visitable people." "Two families," he said, "in particular have treated me with as much cordiality as if their pedigrees and mine had grown upon the same sheepskin."<sup>4</sup> That he came from St. Alban's could not long have remained a secret. Curiosity or compassion may have induced the original callers to break in upon his seclusion, and his appearance, his manners, and his intelligence must soon have accredited him to the most sceptical. A few of the inhabitants were sympathetic spirits, and altogether he thought it "the most agreeable neighbourhood" he had ever seen.<sup>5</sup> A twelvemonth before he would have thought

<sup>1</sup> [To Hill, June 16, 1768.]

<sup>2</sup> [To Mrs. Cowper, April 3, 1767.]

<sup>3</sup> [To Hill, July 3, 1765.]

<sup>4</sup> [To Major Cowper, Oct. 18, 1765.]

<sup>5</sup> [*Ibid.*]

it intolerably dull. The still life of Huntingdon suited his altered frame of mind, and had the twofold charm of fitness and novelty.

His mode of passing his time was simple. One day in every week he and his brother spent together. Each alternately visited the other, and the distance of fifteen miles to Cambridge forced Cowper for a while to become a horseman. In the earliest of his letters which has been preserved, August, 1758, he tells a fellow-Templar, Mr. Rowley, that he never mounted a horse unless compelled, because he had a tender skin, and a little contact with the saddle bruised and chafed him.<sup>1</sup> It cost him a good deal of trouble at Huntingdon to attain to a very moderate measure of equestrian skill.<sup>2</sup> Like his own John Gilpin, he was not only "galled in his seat," but had a difficulty in keeping it. A walking pace was tedious, a trot jumbled him, and a gallop threatened to throw him into a ditch. Except to take exercise, he rarely stirred from his fireside and his books.

His reading was not the continuation of his London studies. He had entered into a new world of thought, and had completely broken with the past. When he became religious after his great London attack he lost all relish for secular literature. The form that his conversion took would have encouraged a belief that it savoured of the world and the flesh. Hence for years he read no books but spiritual ones, nor much of them. So indifferent was he to all his old pursuits, that he never once, in five-and-twenty years, inquired after the library which he left in town, and which contained part of his father's stores as well as his own.<sup>3</sup> When a quarter of a century

<sup>1</sup> [To Rowley, *Works*, vol. i. p. 24.]

<sup>2</sup> [To Hill, Aug. 14, 1765.]

<sup>3</sup> Some of these books which had belonged to the poet's father, and which passed to John Cowper at his father's death, Mr. Gough, a college friend of John Cowper, wished to purchase, and John Cowper wrote to him from St. Alban's, November 3, 1757, "My brother desired that I would part with them to him, and as he seemed particularly inclinable to take them, I could not easily refuse him."—Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes*, vol. viii. p. 561.

had gone by, he asked Hill if he could inform a bookless student in what nook his stray volumes might be found. In the interval somebody had appropriated this convenient collection of authors which appeared not to have an owner, and Cowper consoled himself with the reflection, "that no such loss did ever befall any other man, or could ever befall him again." To read and meditate upon religion was at present his sole occupation in his solitary hours. "A letter," he said, "upon any other subject is more insipid to me than ever my task was when a school-boy."<sup>1</sup> The pains of hell had lately gat hold upon him, and he turned from everything which belonged to his former self to gaze with undivided and unwearied delight upon the heaven which had opened before his eyes.

He brought to Huntingdon the attendant who waited on him at St. Alban's;<sup>2</sup> and in that charming strain of quiet humour which was as natural to him as to breathe, he unfolds, in a letter to Hill, the difficulty he experienced in his novel task of keeping house for himself and his servant. "A man cannot always live upon sheeps' heads, and liver and lights, like the lions in the Tower; and a joint of meat, in so small a family, is an endless encumbrance. My butcher's bill for last week amounted to four shillings and tenpence. I set off with a leg of lamb, and was forced to give part of it away to my washerwoman. Then I made an experiment upon a sheep's heart, and that was too little. Next I put three pounds of beef into a pie, and this had like to have been too much, for it lasted three days, though my landlord was admitted to a share in it. Then, as to small beer, I am puzzled to pieces about it. I have bought as much for a shilling as will serve us at least a month, and it is grown sour already. In short, I never knew how to pity poor

<sup>1</sup> [To Mrs. Cowper, Sept. 3, 1766.]

<sup>2</sup> Major Cowper was offended that he kept a servant at Huntingdon, and maintained a boy, and threatened to withdraw his allowance. [To Lady Hesketh, Jan. 2, 1786.]



housekeepers before ; but now I cease to wonder at that politic cast which their occupation usually gives to their countenance, for it is really a matter full of perplexity.”<sup>1</sup> The ultimate result of what he called his “good management and clear notion of economical affairs” was that in three months he spent the income of a twelvemonth.<sup>2</sup> In the fourth month he arrived at the conclusion that, to avoid total bankruptcy, he must be boarded as well as lodged. He began at the same time to feel the want of companionship. The visits of his neighbours were not frequent ; and as “cards and dancing” were “the professed business of almost all the gentle inhabitants,”<sup>3</sup> he would have derived no pleasure from a closer intercourse with that portion of the community. Under these circumstances he was induced to take a step which had the happiest influence upon his future life.

Among the friends which Cowper made at Huntingdon was the family of the Unwins, consisting of husband and wife, and a son and daughter. The father, an elderly clergyman, who held a college living upon which he did not reside, had once been master of the free school, and had now a large house in the town, where he took private pupils. He is described by Cowper “as a man of learning and good sense, and as simple as Parson Adams.” His wife, who was much younger than himself, was the daughter of a draper in Ely, of the name of Cawthorne. “She has,” writes Cowper, “a very uncommon understanding, has read much, to excellent purpose, and is more polite than a duchess.” The son was just of age. He was of a singularly amiable and vivacious disposition, with the openness and frankness of youth, had fair talents, and more than average acquirements. The daughter, a girl of eighteen, was “of a piece with the rest of the family,” and was “rather handsome and genteel,” but she must

<sup>1</sup> [To Hill, July 3, 1765.]

<sup>2</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, Nov. 9, 1785.]

<sup>3</sup> [To Mrs. Cowper, Oct. 20, 1766.]

have missed one great charm of the poet's society from having no perception of his humour, which, like a dish of delicate flavour, is lost upon obtuse palates, though, to those who can taste it, it is as much more delicious as it is more refined than coarsely seasoned viands. This little domestic group he pronounced to be altogether the cheerfulest and most agreeable it was possible to conceive. The impression was mutual. From the moment he set foot in the circle "he was treated like a near relation." Fascinated by these new companions, he wondered that he liked Huntingdon so well before he became acquainted with them, and imagined that he should find every place unpleasant that had not an Unwin.<sup>1</sup>

Delighted as Cowper seemed with the whole of the family, the real attraction to him was Mrs. Unwin and her son. Their doctrinal opinions were the same with his own, their piety was earnest and pervading. A reserved person is chilled by reserve and disgusted by forwardness. An ingenuous frankness alone can put him at his ease and elicit a responsive freedom. The artless candour of the young man immediately won the confidence of his bashful elder. They poured out their hearts to each other at the first interview, and the moment his visitor was gone Cowper retired to his bedroom and prayed that God would give "fervency and perpetuity to the friendship, even unto death."<sup>2</sup> As he prayed so it proved in the issue. Of the mother he wrote at the very commencement of the acquaintance, "That woman is a blessing to me, and I never see her without being the better for her company."<sup>3</sup> Just at the time when his solitary situation grew irksome to him, one of Mr. Unwin's pupils left. It occurred to Cowper that he might, perhaps, be allowed to fill the vacancy. The effect which the notion had upon him showed that, though

<sup>1</sup> [To Hill, Oct. 25, 1765.]

<sup>2</sup> [*Early Life*, p. 80.]

<sup>3</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, Oct. 18, 1765.]

perfectly sane, his mind continued to be morbidly sensitive. He was seized with "a tumult of anxious solicitude," and the language of his heart was, "Give me this blessing, or else I die." With a great effort he diverted his thoughts after a day or two into another channel, and found that his mind kept repeating with increased energy, "The Lord God of truth will do this." Manifestly as the words were the offspring of the wish, he was convinced that they were not of his own production, derived some assurance from the presage, and took courage to propound his darling scheme. His proposal was at once accepted, and on November 11, 1765, he removed to his new retreat.<sup>1</sup> It more than answered his fondest anticipations. He had resided there four months when he wrote that in Mrs. Unwin "he could almost fancy his own mother restored to life again, to compensate him for all the friends he had lost, and all his connections broken."<sup>2</sup> On a subsequent occasion he composed some lines, in which he happily expressed the familiar truth, that incidents which appear to us mysterious or purposeless furnish us, in their full development,

With proof that we and our affairs  
Are part of a Jehovah's cares.

Of all the illustrations of this fact which his memorable history afforded, none was more conspicuous than the Providence which led him against his own wishes to Huntingdon, and guided his unwilling footsteps to the door of the Unwins. His disposition inclined him to marriage, but he had too much conscience to run the risk of transmitting his frightful malady, and it is clear that from the period of his second attack, which admitted of no doubtful construction, he had abandoned the idea. He had hardly appeared to be cut off for ever from the intimate delights of a domestic circle, when he found them in the friendship of the inestimable woman whose story is henceforth blended with his own.

<sup>1</sup> [*Early Life*, pp. 80-3.]      <sup>2</sup> [To Mrs. Cowper, March 12, 1766.]



The days of Cowper flowed on in tranquil cheerfulness between devotion, reading, conversation, walking, and gardening. Little more than a year and a half had elapsed when the peace of the household was suddenly interrupted by the violent death of Mr. Unwin. As he was riding one Sunday morning, in July, 1767, to his curacy of Gravely, he was flung from his horse, and his head was dreadfully fractured. He was too much injured to be carried back to Huntingdon, and after lingering till the Thursday, he expired in a cottage about a mile from his home.<sup>1</sup> At such a moment the sympathy of her devoted companion must have been as important to Mrs. Unwin as her own had previously been to him. They at once determined that the change of circumstances should not dissolve a bond which had become stronger than ever; but in a different way the event was big with consequences to Cowper, and instead of depriving him of one associate supplied him with a second. A few days after the accident, the celebrated John Newton was on his road through Huntingdon. His journey thitherwards at this crisis was said by the poet, eighteen years afterwards, to have been such a wonderful dispensation of Providence, that he thought it gave him a claim to the especial attention of a ghostly counsellor, who had been sent by Heaven for the express purpose of finding him out.<sup>2</sup> The result was accomplished by the zealous minister calling, at the request of an acquaintance, upon Mrs. Unwin, to whom he was then a perfect stranger.<sup>3</sup> He invited the friends to settle at his cure of Olney, in Buckinghamshire, and they gladly embraced the offer for the sake of his preaching and conversation. He hired for them an old house, of which the garden at the back was only separated by an orchard from the garden of the vicarage. By opening

<sup>1</sup> [To Mrs. Cowper, July 13, 1767; to Hill, July 16, 1767.]

<sup>2</sup> To Newton, May, 1785.

<sup>3</sup> It is said (*Life of Newton*, by Bull, p. 15) that Newton called on Mrs. Unwin at the request of Dr. Conyers.

doors in the walls of the respective domains a direct communication was established, and the two families lived almost as one. In September the poet removed to a dwelling which was to be his home for twenty years, and where almost all the works were composed which have given an interest to his name and history. The front of his new tenement looked upon the market-place, and wore such a desolate aspect that when young Mr. Unwin first saw it he was shocked to think that his mother lived there. The rest of the town was not attractive. Cowper describes it as "populous, and inhabited chiefly by the half-starved and ragged of the earth."<sup>1</sup> The principal occupation was lace-making, which furnished, even to unremitting diligence, so scanty a pittance, that it was barely sufficient to sustain a miserable existence. When a charitable donation enabled the poet to provide six children with one pair of blankets, "they jumped out of their straw, caught them in their arms, kissed them, blessed them, and danced for joy."<sup>2</sup> The majority of the people were brutal in their manners and heathenish in their morals. Little creatures seven years of age made the place resound every evening with curses and villainous songs. The cottages were disposed in a long, dreary street, and the tottering mud walls and torn thatch of many of them were in keeping with the wretchedness of the inmates. The surrounding meadows were flooded during the winter; and Cowper was often doomed to sit for months over a cellar filled with water. The air in the rainy season was impregnated with the fishy-smelling fumes of the marsh miasma; and to this he ascribed the slow and spirit-oppressing fever which visited all persons who remained long in the locality. None of these evils had much effect upon him during the early years of his residence. He was experiencing the truth that the "mind is its own place," and the social and spiritual advantages he enjoyed made Olney a heaven to him.

<sup>1</sup> [To Unwin, Nov. 18, 1782.]

<sup>2</sup> [To Unwin, Dec. 31, 1785.]

Pecuniary embarrassments had induced the vicar, Moses Brown, to become a pluralist, and he resided at Blackheath, where he was chaplain of Morden College. His debts failed to make a numerous family a care to him. He said that when he had only two or three children he thought he should have been distracted with the anxiety of providing for them, but when he had a dozen he was easy, and thought no more of the matter. According to Mr. Cecil, he was a pious minister, who had trained many of his people in the way they should go,<sup>1</sup> and an over-indulgent father, who had allowed his sons to take the way they should not.

Mr. Newton had been his deputy for three years and a half when Cowper settled in the parish. His father was the master of a trading vessel, and he had himself spent the larger part of twenty years at sea. He was once impressed on board a man-of-war, was made a midshipman, deserted, and was flogged. In his rage at the subsequent hardships he endured, he formed the design of murdering the captain, and would have executed his intention but that he could not bear that the lady whom he afterwards married should think ill of him. He was a scoffer of the Bible, a frightful blasphemer, and an abandoned profligate. He had seen and suffered much, and both in good and in evil had displayed a resolute will. By the force of a powerful understanding and an inflexible purpose he became, during his voyages, a proficient in Latin, learnt the rudiments of mathematics and French, and later, when on land, acquired a fair knowledge

<sup>1</sup> Newton wrote, September 14, 1765, "I have been here about fifteen months. The Lord has led me by a way that I little expected, to a pleasant lot, where the Gospel has been many years known, and is highly valued by many. We have a large church and congregation, and a considerable number of lively, thriving believers, and in general go on with great comfort and harmony. I meet with less opposition from the world than is usual where the Gospel is preached. This burden was borne by Mr. Brown for ten years, and in that course of time some of the fiercest opposers were removed, some wearied, and some softened; so that we are now remarkably quiet in that respect."—Newton's *Works*, vol. ii. p. 94.



of Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac. Desperate as he had been in wickedness, defying both God and man, a feminine tenderness lurked in his nature. On one of his voyages, when a letter from Mrs. Newton miscarried, and he imagined that she was probably dead, he lost his appetite and rest, and in three weeks' time was brought to the brink of the grave. With an adamant frame which had resisted hardships that few of the strongest men could have withstood, and with a marvellous energy of disposition which had once spurned all control, he had nearly died of a broken heart from the mere apprehension that his wife was no more. He had arrived at his ultimate convictions on religion by a gradual process, and had passed through various stages of wickedness, temptation, conflict, and amendment. Though his principles and conduct had long been fixed, he was not ordained till he was close upon thirty-nine, when he was appointed to the curacy of Olney.

Like most self-made men, he was very vain. The scraps of his conversation, taken down by Cecil, he revised for publication. He published numbers of his own letters in his lifetime, and revised many more for publication after his death. They are egotistical in the extreme. In his multitudinous admonitions, which are mostly commonplace, however appropriate they might be to the persons and occasions, he usually takes himself for the text. The perpetual lamentations over his religious shortcomings are not an exception to his vanity. It was the language of the entire party to which he belonged, and was considered by them an evidence of their superiority to the world at large. The sense of their imperfections might be just, but the parade of it belonged to the species of pride which apes humility. His feelings on some points were the reverse of sensitive, on others they were acute beyond what is usual, and as lasting as they were strong. His knowledge of human nature was confined, and he had not the remotest conception of the prudence required

in dealing with Cowper's form of mental disease. His preaching<sup>1</sup> was pernicious to it. In his *Letters on Religious Subjects*, he broadly avowed himself a Calvinist.<sup>2</sup> After fifty years' experience of Methodistical preaching, Wesley says that, among other evil effects, "it brought forth enthusiasm, imaginary inspiration, ascribing to the all-wise God all the wild, absurd, self-inconsistent dreams of a heated imagination."<sup>3</sup> The latter part of the sentence sums up the nature of Cowper's madness. "In no form of insanity," says Dr. Copland, "is greater care requisite than in the religious, "to protect the unfortunate patient from his insane impulses to commit suicide and murder. Pirel states that a person, after listening to an alarming sermon, considered himself as irretrievably lost, and murdered all his children in order that they might not experience eternal damnation."<sup>4</sup>

Among the books which had charmed Cowper in youth was Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. He wrote of it in his *Tirocinium*—

Oh thou, whom borne on Fancy's eager wing  
Back to the season of life's happy spring,  
I pleased remember, and while memory yet  
Holds fast her office here can ne'er forget.

Newton, in a letter to a lady, July 20, 1768, says, "Soon after I returned from Yorkshire I began to expound the *Pilgrim's Progress* in our meetings on Tuesday evenings; and, though we have been almost seven months travelling with the Pilgrim, we have not yet left the house Beautiful, but I believe shall set off for the Valley of Humiliation

<sup>1</sup> He preached for an hour. "I cannot wind up my ends," he says, "to my own satisfaction in a much shorter time, nor am I pleased with myself if I greatly exceed it."—Letter, dated Sept. 10, 1777, *Works*, vol. ii. p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> Letter 9, *Works*, vol. i. p. 164.

<sup>3</sup> Southey's *Life of Wesley*, vol. ii. p. 526.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Copland, *Dictionary of Medicine*, part vii. p. 519. He says that "numerous other instances of the same kind might be adduced."

in about three weeks." It was his proper goal. In effect he had cut up the narrative into texts for sermons. It was no longer the Pilgrim's *Progress*. He was stopped at every step by Newton's prolix disquisitions. The "well-told tale, the humorous vein, strong sense and simple style," which is Cowper's description, lost their charm and cohesion, served out, at intervals of a week for months together, in scanty fragments smothered in verbiage. "I hope," wrote Newton complacently, "the attempt has been greatly blessed among us," and it may have suited his illiterate hearers, but his parochial Pilgrim was of a different order from the genius who fascinated Cowper's boyhood, and it is not likely that he ever accepted Newton's Pilgrim for a representation of Bunyan's. To cultivated minds Newton's inordinately diffuse and disenchanted version would have been rather akin to those harangues of which Cowper said, in his *Progress of Error*, that they "fell soporific on the listless ear."

The closest intimacy at once sprang up between Cowper and Newton. They made it a rule to spend four days in the week together, and were rarely "seven successive waking hours apart." Newton numbered the alliance among his "principal blessings."<sup>1</sup> It was a blessing in which his parishioners shared. He considered Cowper "a sort of curate," from his constant attendance upon the sick and afflicted. The lay-pastor, we are told, was affable in his conversation with them, sympathised in their distresses, advised them in their difficulties, and animated them by his prayers. Absorbed in his round of religious duties, he was averse to all other employment. "You will ascribe," he wrote to Hill, in May, 1768, "my dryness and conciseness in the epistolary way to almost a disuse of my pen. My youth and my scribbling vein are gone together, and unless they had been better employed it is fit they should."<sup>2</sup> He said shortly afterwards that he

<sup>1</sup> [*Sermon occasioned by the decease of William Cowper*, by Samuel Greathead, p. 16.]

<sup>2</sup> [To Hill, May 3, 1768.]



had that within him which hindered him wretchedly in all he ought to do, and that he was prone to trifle, and allow time to run to waste ;<sup>1</sup> but this is a reproach which would be uttered by most persons who exact of themselves a rigorous account.

His life at Olney would have been effeminate in a man not disordered, but in his state its little peculiarities become pleasing and picturesque. As his history develops we find his habits ceased to be hardy. He was obliged to humour his constitution in much, which fostered enervating feelings in everything. In 1785, in commenting on Pitt's tax upon gloves, he complained of his having called them a "luxury"; "for, having worn them," he said, "for so many years, if they be indeed a luxury, they are such a one as I could very ill spare."<sup>2</sup> Pitt might reasonably call gloves a luxury, when to this hour they are not worn by the vast majority of Englishmen, or too rarely to require more than a pair a year of that cheaper kind which were only taxed at a penny. But Cowper did not judge Pitt's language from the habits of his countrymen. He spoke from his personal feelings, and the bodily delicacy he had nurtured made those gloves a necessity which would have been rather an encumbrance than a luxury to most of those among whom he dwelt. He envied rustics, "denied that sensibility of pain with which refinement is endued,"<sup>3</sup> but could not in idea transfer to his own tender frame their indifference to biting frost and chilling blasts.

He whistles as he goes, light-hearted wretch,  
Cold and yet cheerful,<sup>4</sup>

he says of the postman in winter—wretched to Cowper's apprehension, though cheerful and light-hearted, because he himself would have been wretched in his place. He said, indeed, in the *Task*, that when winter soaked the fields, and female feet were too weak to struggle with tenacious clay, or ford rivulets, the business of exploring

<sup>1</sup> [To Mrs. Cowper, undated, 1768.]

<sup>2</sup> To Newton, June 25, 1785.

<sup>3</sup> *The Task*, book iv. line 357.

<sup>4</sup> [*Ibid.*, lines 12, 13.]

the neighbourhood for fresh beauties fell on him singly.<sup>1</sup> But his own feet were fastidious, and he reminds Newton, in 1786, that for eight months in the year, during the thirteen previous years, the dirty, impassable ways had confined him to a gravel walk thirty yards long, to the injury of his health.<sup>2</sup> Dirty the ways were then in most country places. Whether they were impassable depended on the spirit in which they were regarded. Johnson's brother, Nathaniel, hearing complaints of bad roads, remarked that he travelled the country more than most people, and had never seen a bad road in his life.<sup>3</sup> Cowper was far gone in effeminacy when the roads looked so bad in his eyes that he remained shut up for eight months in every year rather than set foot on highways which served the entire population of his day. The hairdresser at Olney who waited on him while he lived there told Mackintosh and Basil Montagu, in 1801, that he seldom ventured beyond the garden.<sup>4</sup> Cowper could only traverse dry roads and trim greensward, to commune with nature in her kindest moods. His body, he confesses, lost its energy from its eight months of inactivity, and the mind not only drooped with the body, but having little in a stagnant existence to divert it from its morbid fancies, they haunted him incessantly, and inflicted on him a thousand inborn sorrows, begotten of his pusillanimous

<sup>1</sup> [*The Task*, book i. lines 215-8.]

<sup>2</sup> To Newton, Aug. 5, 1786.

<sup>3</sup> *Anecdotes*, by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Life of Mackintosh*, by his son, vol. i. p. 156. An aged woman at Olney told Mr. Bruce, in 1858, which was seventy-eight years after Newton had left the parish, that she had seen him walk from the vicarage to the church in pattens. This not very reliable testimony Mr. Bruce adduces as evidence of the peculiar badness of the roads at Olney. In my memory pattens were in general use with women in the country, who walked for miles in them if the roads were muddy, to shop or to visit friends, and the obvious reason, assuming the incident to be true, why Newton availed himself of the common female resource, on some special occasion, was not that the roads were worse at Olney than elsewhere, but that they were worse than usual on that day, and he wished to avoid the unseemly appearance of officiating in dirty shoes. Had pattens, or their equivalent, been an ordinary necessity, Newton would have had his own provision against emergencies, and would have gone to church equipped like a man, and not like a woman.

dread of a muddy road. "It is the place of all the world I love the most," he wrote to Newton, July 27, 1783, "not for any happiness it affords me, but because here I can be miserable with most convenience to myself and with the least disturbance to others."

Since Cowper's removal from Huntingdon, distance interposed to prevent frequent intercourse with his brother, and their weekly dwindled down to annual visits. In the middle of February, 1770, he was summoned to Cambridge by the fatal illness of this sole remaining relic of his home. "We have lost the best classic and most liberal thinker in our University," wrote Dr. Bennet, Bishop of Cloyne, to Dr. Parr, when he announced the death of John Cowper. "He sat so long at his studies that the posture gave rise to an abscess in his liver, and he fell a victim to learning." So said John Cowper himself when he was dying. "I have laboured day and night to perfect myself in things of no profit; I have sacrificed my health to these pursuits, and am suffering the consequences of my misspent labour. I wanted to be highly applauded, and was flattered up to the height of my wishes; now I must learn a new lesson." He had been, in his own language, "blameless in his outward conduct, and trusted in himself that he was righteous." He could not yield to the belief that he stood in need of a Redeemer, and had long desired to be a deist. After the transformation which had taken place in Cowper at St. Alban's, he endeavoured to impress his convictions upon his brother, who first discussed the question, and then, to avoid disputes, listened to argument and exhortation in silence. His attention, however, was roused. He bought the best writers on controverted points, studied them with diligence, and compared them with Scripture. Blinded, he says, by prejudice, he continued not to perceive the doctrine of redemption, yet wished to embrace it, and was even persuaded that he should some day be a convert. Upon the whole, his antipathy gained upon his inclination; for,



at the period of his illness, he was on the verge of closing with the deism which appeared so attractive, and which did not, like the Gospel, interfere with his self-esteem. Cowper, on his arrival, found him ignorant that his illness was mortal, and quite unconcerned about religion. There was one seeming exception to his ordinary indifference. "When I talked to him," says the poet, "of the Lord's dealings with myself, he would press my hand, and look kindly at me, and seemed to love me the better for it." But this did not arise from any partiality for doctrines which he heard heedlessly at other times. The action clearly proceeded from generous sympathy with the griefs and joys of the speaker. As warm hearts are easily kindled into gratitude, the remark "that, though many sick men had friends, it was not every man who had a friend that could pray for him," drew forth from the sufferer an additional tenderness. "He generally expressed it," says Cowper, "by calling for blessings upon me in the most affectionate terms, and with a look and manner not to be described." At the expiration of three weeks, as he was praying one afternoon to himself in bed, he suddenly burst into tears, and with a loud cry exclaimed, "Oh! forsake me not." He afterwards stated that he had reflected much upon Christianity during his illness, that the subject remained obscure to him, and that he sent forth the cry at the moment when the light was darted into his soul. He threw his arms round the neck of his brother, and, leaning his head upon him, said, "If I live, you and I shall be more like one another than we have been. But, whether I live or not, all is well. God has visited me with this sickness to teach me what I was too proud to learn in health." At another time he added, "I see the rock upon which I once split, and I see the rock of my salvation. I have learned *that* in a moment which I could not have learned by reading books in many years. How plain do texts appear to which, after consulting all the commentators, I could

hardly affix a meaning! There is but one key to the New Testament, there is but one interpreter." The key he had discovered was that "Jesus Christ was delivered for our offences, and rose again for our justification." He wondered, as well he might, that a fact so plain should have been invisible to him before. His self-abasement was henceforth great. "That I ever had a being," he said, "cannot be too soon forgot." He had charge of a parish about seven miles from Cambridge, and thought much of the people there. "Thou hast intrusted many souls unto me," he exclaimed in one of his prayers, "and I have not been able to teach them, because I knew Thee not myself." His repentance was accompanied by the hope that it would be accepted through the Saviour whose atonement he had understood so late, and after a few days more of bodily suffering, in that hope he calmly expired on the 20th of March.<sup>1</sup> "I have felt a joy," wrote Cowper, "upon the subject of my brother's death, such as I never felt but in my own conversion."<sup>2</sup>

Three years from this period the joy which had resulted from his conversion, was extinguished, never again, except in transient gleams, to be renewed on earth.

## [CHAPTER VI]

NOTHING could have been worse for Cowper's disease than his removal to Olney. The place was humid, and bad for his digestion. His mental malady was hypochondriasis in the form which is coupled with delusion. Its primary cause is a weakly constitution, which has for its basis or accompaniment deranged digestive functions. As the brain depends for its healthy exercise upon the

<sup>1</sup> *Adelphi, a Sketch of the Character and an Account of the last Illness of the late Rev. John Cowper*, by his Brother, the late William Cowper, transcribed by John Newton.]

<sup>2</sup> [To Unwin, March 31, 1770.]

blood, which is the product of digestion, it naturally becomes disordered likewise. Any fresh strain or excitement easily converts the ordinary malady into an acute attack. Life under Newton taxed Cowper's powers, and kept him exclusively engaged in one pursuit, which must have been often exhausting. He was accustomed to take part in the prayer-meetings held in the parish, and he informed Mr. Greathead that his constitutional timidity vanished on these occasions before his "awful yet delightful consciousness of the presence of his Saviour."<sup>1</sup> This, while it shows the exhilarating nature of his emotions when his heart was stirred the deepest, appears to have been an act of doubtful prudence in which his piety engaged him, though the danger did not proceed from religious excitement, but from his nervous dread of a public display. His fear of an audience put an end to the idea of taking Orders, which duty suggested to him when he came fresh with enthusiasm from St. Alban's. "Had I," he said, "the zeal of Moses, I should want an Aaron for my spokesman."<sup>2</sup> The familiarity he had contracted in the interval with rustic congregations had not removed his apprehensions, and the prospect of pronouncing a prayer before a company of villagers agitated him for hours beforehand. Though the effect was comparatively brief, it bore too close a resemblance to his former disastrous experience to be hazarded wisely. No ill consequences, however, appeared to ensue. Nor, unless Cowper communicated his sensations, could any blame be attached to Mr. Newton, who might easily suppose that the man who trembled to be examined at the bar of the House of Lords on a subject of which he knew nothing would have no apprehension of pouring out the petitions which filled his heart before the lace-makers of Olney.

Cowper always referred to the eight years and a half which elapsed between his restoration at St. Alban's and

<sup>1</sup> [*Sermon* by Samuel Greathead, p. 16.]

<sup>2</sup> [To Mrs. Cowper, Oct. 20, 1766.]



the renewal of his disorder at Olney as to years of unparalleled joy. But he had his morbid periods antecedent to his great attack at the beginning of 1773. Newton wrote, July 9th, 1772, to Mrs. Newton, in London, "Dear Sir Cowper is in the depths as much as ever. The manner of his prayer last night led me to speak from Hebrews ii. 18. I do not think he was much the better for it, but perhaps it might suit others."<sup>1</sup> Evidently the mental depression was not supposed to be a malady. On November 19, Newton records in his diary, "Mr. Cowper has been ailing these two or three days, but I hope he is better."<sup>2</sup> The crisis arrived on the morning of January 2, 1773, when, as Newton told Mr. Cecil, "the first symptoms were discovered in his discourse."<sup>3</sup>

This, Newton says, was "soon after he had undertaken a new engagement in composition." The engagement must have been the Olney Hymns. In his preface to them Newton says, "We had not proceeded far upon our proposed plan before my dear friend was prevented by a long and affecting indisposition from affording me any further assistance." He has been charged with want of judgment because, finding Cowper devoted to religion and fond of poetry, he advised him to put some of his religion into verse. The theory is untenable that the train of thought suggested by the Hymns disordered his understanding.

It was in a different way that the composition proved injurious. In announcing eight years afterwards his next poetical undertaking to Newton, Cowper says, "It will not be long, perhaps, before you will receive a poem called the Progress of Error. That will be succeeded by another, in due time, called Truth. Don't be alarmed, I ride Pegasus with a curb. He will never run away with me again. I have even convinced Mrs. Unwin that I can manage him, and make him stop when I please."<sup>4</sup> This

<sup>1</sup> Bull's *Life of Newton*, p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>3</sup> Newton's *Works*, vol. i. p. xlvii.

<sup>4</sup> To Newton, Dec. 21, 1780.

is a conclusive proof that the composition of the hymns had contributed to the attack of 1773, through his having pursued his theme with too much ardour, and overtaken an intellect which was unable to endure a strain. It was his nature to throw himself with enthusiasm into any occupation which pleased him, and no undertaking could have enlisted more of his sympathies than the one in which Newton had embarked him. He had laboured at the hymns till the constant strain of mental effort had disordered his health. It was not the nature of the ideas, but the effort of composition which was too much for him. Prior to experience it was not easy to divine that he would rhyme with such assiduity as to bring on a fit of insanity.

In attacks like Cowper's, reason and will are suspended, and the man is the victim of mental forces which he is as impotent to control as the physical pains of the body. When the malady assailed him in 1773, his power to set his faculties in motion was gone, and he spent hours in blank imbecility, unless an impetus was given to his mind by a question, when he was capable of returning a rational answer. Mrs. Unwin and the Newtons mismanaged him. Though they thought means lawful in other cases, they considered that his recovery was to be left to God alone, and allowed many months to elapse before they applied to Dr. Cotton.<sup>1</sup> A melancholy of the darkest die overshadowed him. He believed that his food was poisoned, that everybody hated him, and especially Mrs. Unwin, though he would allow no one else to wait upon him.<sup>2</sup> His disposition to commit suicide required perpetual vigilance, which, coupled with the trying nature of his delusions, rendered the task of tending him a fearful task both to mind and body. His incomparable friend discharged the office for nearly two years, not only with cheerfulness, but with gratitude, and said that if ever she

<sup>1</sup> Southey, *Correspondence with Caroline Bowles*, p. 331.

<sup>2</sup> To Lady Hesketh, Jan. 16, 1786.

praised God it was when she found that she was to have all the labour. Her constitution never entirely rallied from the shock it received. Mr. Newton in a less degree had his share in the burden. That he might be more out of the noise of a fair, Cowper moved in March, for a single night, to the vicarage, which he had previously refused to enter, and chose to remain there a year and a quarter. As often as Mrs. Unwin urged him to return to his own house, he wept and implored to be permitted to stay where he was. An inmate in his condition was no small disturbance to the domestic peace of Mr. Newton. But his piety and affection were equal to the occasion. "The Lord," he wrote towards the conclusion of the poor patient's stay, "has given us such a love to him, both as a believer and as a friend, that I am not weary." When the deliverance came he confessed that his feelings had sometimes been restive, but added, "I think I can hardly ever suffer too much for such a friend."

The recovery of Cowper followed the same course that it had done at St. Alban's. From having his whole attention turned inwards upon his despairing thoughts, he began to notice the things about him. He fed the chickens; and some incident made him smile—the first smile that had been seen upon his face for more than sixteen months. He was continually employed in gardening, and talked freely upon his favourite employment. Other topics of conversation he rarely noticed. As he continued to improve, he expressed in verse, according to his wont, the desperate ideas which burned within him. At the end of May, 1774, he seemed to realise his position in Mr. Newton's house, and suddenly desired to go back to his own. A few days were necessary to prepare it, and he passed the interval in impatience.

The attack at Olney lasted longer than the one which grew out of the business of the clerkship, and the restoration was less complete. Two distinct impressions filled the mind of Cowper—an awful melancholy which impelled



him to suicide, and a piety which led him to place his whole dependence upon God. He blended these pervading feelings, and fancied that the Almighty had commanded him, as a trial of obedience, to offer up himself for a sacrifice, as Abraham had been commanded to offer up his son. In this persuasion he attempted to commit suicide, and failed to accomplish his design. He imagined that his faltering purpose was a proof of his faithlessness, and that he was condemned in consequence to irrevocable perdition. "This comes," he wrote to Lady Hesketh, May 15, 1797, "from the most miserable of beings, whom a terrible minute made such." No one who reads his Personal Narrative of his previous seizure can fail to remark that, though otherwise written in a sober strain, he imperfectly distinguished between supernatural visitations and the effects of disease. The vividness of his delusions begot in him the conviction that they must be derived from a source more potent than a disordered brain. "My dreams," he wrote, "are of a texture that will not suffer me to ascribe them to any cause but the operation of an exterior agency."<sup>1</sup> His delusion was in the fact that he mistook dreams for visitations either from heaven or hell. "I had a dream twelve years ago," he wrote to Newton in 1785, "before the recollection of which all consolation vanishes, and as it seems to me must always vanish."<sup>2</sup> After his Olney attack he acknowledged to Lady Hesketh that he had delusions.<sup>3</sup> Yet to the end of his days he remained persuaded that the injunction to self-destruction, and the subsequent sentence of condemnation, were a revelation from heaven. Sane in every other particular, he could not perceive that the visions and voices had been the products of insanity. He was the slave of an idea which he acquired in madness, and which he yet believed to have had an origin that was independent of it. From this hour he lived in his own

<sup>1</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, Jan. 18, 1787.]

<sup>2</sup> [To Newton, Oct. 16, 1785.]

<sup>3</sup> To Lady Hesketh, Jan. 16, 1786.

conviction a doomed man, and if hope ever gleamed upon him, "it was merely," he said, "as a flash in a dark night, during which the heavens seemed opened only to shut again."

Cowper's love for Christianity continued unabated while he believed himself shut out from its blessing, and condemned to suffer the woes which were kept in store for evil-doers. He paid the fullest homage to religion, but personally felt that he was excluded from it. Since judgment had been pronounced, he argued that it was useless for him to pray; nay more, that "to implore mercy would be to oppose the determinate counsel of God."<sup>1</sup> He ceased to attend public or domestic worship, and behaved in all respects as though his personal concern in Christianity was at an end. He wrote to Newton, "A king may forbid a man to appear before him, and it were strange if the King of kings might not do the same. I know it to be His will that I should not enter into His Presence now. When the prohibition is taken off I shall enter; but in the meantime I should neither please Him, nor serve myself, by intruding."<sup>2</sup> He said, in 1782, that he had not asked a blessing upon his food for ten years, nor ever expected to ask it again.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Unwin consulted him on the proper mode of keeping Sunday. He gave his opinion, but added that he considered himself as no longer interested in the question.<sup>4</sup> He believed himself "indifferently qualified for the consideration of theological matters." "The most useful and the most delightful topics of that kind," he said, "are to me forbidden fruit; I tremble if I approach them. It has happened to me sometimes that I have found myself imperceptibly drawn in, and made a party in such discourse. The consequence has been dissatisfaction and self-reproach."<sup>5</sup> When there was a prospect of Mr. Newton's successor in the curacy removing from Olney,

<sup>1</sup> [*Sermon* by S. Greathead, p. 20.]

<sup>2</sup> To Newton, June 4, 1785.

<sup>3</sup> To Bull, Oct. 27, 1782.

<sup>4</sup> [To Unwin, March 28, 1780.]

<sup>5</sup> To Newton, March 19, 1784.

Cowper expressed a desire that he should stay, because a new-comer would wonder at his avoiding every religious observance, and might assail him with arguments, "which would be more profitably discharged against the walls of a tower."<sup>1</sup> This was the calm, inflexible character which his delusion assumed. His soul was not tempest-tossed as in the height of his disease, but the waters froze as they subsided, and presented the smoothness and bleakness of ice.

It was not till May, 1776, that Cowper renewed his correspondence with Hill, who managed his pecuniary affairs. For upwards of three years his faculties appear to have been unequal to the production of an ordinary letter. He says he was a child, and was compelled to seek amusement in childish things. Religion, which had been his sole pursuit, being forbidden him, his life was suddenly reduced to a blank. His earliest attempt to fill up the vacancy was by mechanical occupations. "Incapable," he says, "of diverting myself either with company or books, and yet in a condition that made some diversion necessary, I was glad of anything that would engage my attention, without fatiguing it."<sup>2</sup> In 1774 he was offered a leveret, and perceived that in the attempt to tame it he would find the sort of employment he required. He was soon taking care of three leverets, which grew up as tame as cats, and as fond of human society. As his health improved he resolved to be a carpenter, and constructed boxes, tables, and stools. The strain to which he was put in the constant use of saw and plane inflamed and "almost put out" his eyes, which were never strong,<sup>3</sup> and after a twelve-month he exchanged the heavy work for the more delicate

<sup>1</sup> [To Newton, Oct. 16, 1785.]

<sup>2</sup> Cowper's *Account of his Hares*; *Works*, vol. iv. p. 422.

<sup>3</sup> To Lady Hesketh, Jan. 16 and 23, 1786. "The strains and the exertions of hard labour distended and relaxed the blood vessels to such a degree that an inflammation ensued so painful that for a year I was in continual torment, and had so far lost the sight of one of them that I could distinguish with it nothing but the light, and very faintly that,"



task of making bird and squirrel cages. He became tired of this calling, and having taken a share, from the time he settled in the country, in the common operations of the garden, he now aspired to succeed with its nicer products. His pride was to raise the earliest cucumbers and melons. An orange tree and two or three myrtles exercised his ingenuity for an entire winter in the effort to guard them from frost. "I contrived," he says, "to give them a fire-heat; and have waded night after night through the snow, with the bellows under my arm, just before going to bed, to give the latest possible puff to the embers." This suggested a greenhouse, which he built with his own hands, "and which afforded him amusement for a longer time than any expedient to which he had fled from the misery of having nothing to do."<sup>1</sup> In the year 1780 he bethought himself of landscape-drawing, and commissioned Mr. Unwin to purchase him five shillings' worth of materials, adding, "I do not think my talent in the art worth more."<sup>2</sup> He succeeded beyond expectation, and in a little while he glanced, in his playful way, at the excellence of his productions. "I admire them myself, and Mrs. Unwin admires them; and her praise and my praise put together are fame enough for me."<sup>3</sup> This occupation also turned out injurious to his eyes, and he abandoned the pursuit as he was attaining to skill in it. His proficiency in his several mechanic employments he ascribed to heroic perseverance, and not to natural dexterity. He did not rely exclusively upon manual arts, but it was some time before he discovered that reading and writing were more effectual. With the world of sacred literature closed to him, he reverted to profane. For the first time since he left London he took to reading secular books, and appears to have had a preference for the works of the day. His slender income was diminished by the death of his brother, who contributed to his support, and in 1776

<sup>1</sup> [To Mrs. King, Oct. 11, 1788.]

<sup>2</sup> [To Unwin, Feb. 13, 1780.]

<sup>3</sup> [To Newton, May 3, 1780.]

he even adopted the idea of supplying the deficiency by his own exertions. He conceived the humble scheme of instructing a few boys, between eight and ten, in the rudiments of the classics, and applied to Hill to recommend him. He would have found pleasure for a while in recalling and imparting his familiar schoolboy lore, but the fact could not have been suppressed that he had lately emerged from a long fit of lunacy, and no parents came forward to intrust their sons to his charge. "If it were to rain pupils," he wrote, "perhaps I might catch a tubful; but till it does, the fruitlessness of my inquiries makes me think I must keep my Greek and Latin to myself."<sup>1</sup>

In summer Cowper wanted little aid from books or mechanic arts. His love of fine weather, sauntering, and gardening kept him as happy out of doors as his disorder permitted. Winter was the period when he needed every device to fill up his hours, and divert his mind from preying on itself. The year 1780 made a woeful gap in his enjoyments, for it was the year which deprived him of the society of Mr. Newton, who afterwards informed Mr. Cecil that he remained till he had "buried the old crop on which any dependence could be placed." The "old crop" must have been the crop he inherited on going to Olney, which he seems to have found in a better state than he left it. He did not influence the rising generation. He said "that he believed he should never have left had not so incorrigible a spirit prevailed" in the parish which he had "long laboured to reform."<sup>2</sup> "I see in this world," he once remarked, "two heaps—human happiness and misery. If I can take but the smallest bit from one heap and add to the other, I carry a point."<sup>3</sup> He had abundant opportunities for the exercise of the tenderness and beneficence of his nature in poverty-stricken Olney, and had exhibited them in an extraordinary degree on the occasion

<sup>1</sup> [To Hill, July 6 and Aug. 1, 1776.]

<sup>2</sup> Cecil's *Works*, vol. i. p. 357.

<sup>3</sup> [Cecil's *Memoir of Newton*, Newton's *Works*, vol. i. p. lvi.]

of a fire in October, 1777, which involved numbers of inhabitants in extreme distress. In the midst of his exertions and liberality a mob of revellers, "full of fury and liquor," beset his house on the 5th of November, and he was obliged to buy them off to save his wife from the terrors of the attack. "We dwell," he wrote, "among lions and firebrands, with men whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongues a sharp sword."<sup>1</sup> When, therefore, Mr. Thornton presented him to the Rectory of St. Mary Woolnoth, in London, he resigned a charge where his zeal was not sufficient to produce reformation, and his benevolence could not secure him from ingratitude. "Next to the duties of his ministry, he had made it," he said, "the business of his life to attend to his afflicted friend,"<sup>2</sup> and, however much the companionship may have been diminished by Cowper's refusal to participate in any act of religion, his loss must have been severely felt. Cowper's sense of the debt he owed him, and his affection for him, survived their separation. "In the pulpit, and out of the pulpit," he wrote, in 1791, "you have laboured in every possible way to serve us; and we must have a short memory indeed for the kindness of a friend, could we, by any means, become forgetful of yours." If time was then wearing out Newton, Cowper says of himself that he ought to be thankful that it was wearing him out too, "since I should otherwise be in danger of surviving all that I have ever loved—the most melancholy lot that can befall a mortal."<sup>3</sup>

True bliss, if man may reach it, is composed  
Of hearts in union mutually disclosed.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Page, the successor of Mr. Newton, exasperated the parishioners, and found no favour with the poet. The new minister was dismissed from the curacy in a twelve-

<sup>1</sup> To Mr. Thornton, Nov. 18, 1787.

<sup>2</sup> [Letter to John Johnson, after Cowper's death.]

<sup>3</sup> To Newton, June 24, 1791.

<sup>4</sup> *Conversation*, lines 679, 680.



month, but he appears to have continued preaching in some building out of a spirit of opposition for four years longer, when, having quarrelled with his two or three lingering adherents, he withdrew altogether. His last words to his audience were, "Now let us pray for your wicked vicar." He had been replaced in the beginning of 1781 by Thomas Scott, the author of the *Commentary on the Bible*, who also wrote a narrative of his religious experiences, entitled "*The Force of Truth*," which Cowper revised "as to style."<sup>1</sup> He was regarded with respect, but not with fondness by Cowper, and was no addition to his social resources.<sup>2</sup>

After the departure of Newton Cowper says he "lived the life of a solitary." He "was not visited by a single neighbour," because he had "none with whom he could associate."<sup>3</sup> Bull, a dissenting minister at Newport Pagnell, five miles away, was the only one with whom he could converse at all.<sup>4</sup> "A situation like this," he wrote of Olney, "in which I am as unknown to the world as I am ignorant of all that passes in it, would exactly suit me, were my subjects of meditation as agreeable as my leisure is uninterrupted."<sup>5</sup> His own household had long been reduced to Mrs. Unwin. Her son resided at his living of Stock, in Essex. Her daughter had married, in

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Scott*, p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> Scott's notion was that religious earnestness was to be measured by the length of preaching. He relates of his former vicar, at Ravenstone, that "one day he remonstrated with me on the length of my sermons, which fell not much short of an hour, and he mentioned by name several clergymen who preached twenty, fifteen, twelve, or even ten minutes. My answer was that I feared they were in jest, but I was in earnest" (*Life*, p. 125). Congregations are not edified by being wearied. Wilson, in his *Arte of Rhetorike*, published in 1553, says, "Some offend much in tediousness, whose part it were to comfort all men with cheerfulness. Yea, the preachers of God mind so much edifying of souls that they often forget we have any bodies. And, therefore, some do not so much good with telling the truth, as they do harm with dulling the hearers."

<sup>3</sup> [To Mr. Hurdis, Aug. 9, 1791.]

<sup>4</sup> [To Mr. Johnson, March 8, 1786.]

<sup>5</sup> [To Newton, July 27, 1783.]

1774, a worthy clergyman, Matthew Powley, and was settled in Yorkshire.<sup>1</sup> The solitude had not been without its fruits. In the winter of 1780 the melancholy recluse had found himself without a sufficient expedient to kill time and care, and Mrs. Unwin had suggested to him to turn poet in earnest.

He had previously been accustomed to compose short pieces on occasional subjects—such as his old friend Thurlow's promotion to the Chancellorship, the burning of Lord Mansfield's library, and the starvation of a goldfinch in the adjoining house. "It is not," he said, "when I will, or upon what I will, but as a thought happens to occur to me, and then I versify whether I will or not."<sup>2</sup> He states that he wrote solely for amusement, "as a gentleman performer takes up his fiddle," and found so much pleasure in the employment that he often wished he possessed the "faculty divine," and could be more than a trifler in the art.<sup>3</sup> When Mrs. Unwin urged him to attempt something of greater moment, she gave him the Progress of Error for a subject. He completed it in December, and in the three following months produced Truth, Table Talk, and Expostulation—about two thousand five hundred lines in all. He would gladly have sent them straight into the world, but the publishing season was past, and it was arranged that his book should be printed in the summer and autumn of 1781, to be ready against the succeeding winter. The stimulus supplied by the prospect, and the gratification of seeing his productions in type, set him rhyming afresh, in spite of the sunny weather, which

<sup>1</sup> Powley was acquainted with Newton, and became engaged to Miss Unwin through his visits to Olney. It is reasonable to suppose that Cowper and Mrs. Unwin settled to marry when Miss Unwin should leave, in order that when the house had no other inmates than themselves, their companionship might have the sanction of marriage. As to Cowper's betrothal to Mrs. Unwin, see Bull's *Life of Newton*, p. 192. Prudential considerations, no doubt, preponderated against it.

<sup>2</sup> [To Unwin, July 11, 1780.]

<sup>3</sup> [To Unwin, undated, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 356.]

usually put a stop to his mental employments, and between May and August he more than doubled the quantity of his verse, and composed *Hope*, *Charity*, *Conversation*, and *Retirement*. He wrote with less rapidity at the end than at the beginning. "Time was," he says, "when I could with ease produce fifty, sixty, or seventy lines in a morning; now I generally fall short of thirty, and am sometimes forced to be content with a dozen."<sup>1</sup> The facility acquired by practice was not in his case an equivalent for the activity of mind which is generated by novelty.

At Cowper's request Newton wrote a preface to be printed with the collection. According to Hayley, he coveted the honour of being known "as the friend of Cowper," who asked him to write it partly in order to gratify this "affectionate ambition."<sup>2</sup> When Johnson, the publisher, read it, he objected to its insertion on the ground "that, though it would serve to recommend the volume to the religious, it would disgust the profane." Southey says that "Johnson might have considered that Mr. Newton's recommendation would bespeak for the volume a good reception among what is called the religious public, and that among the profane, none who could relish the poems would be deterred by the preface from reading them."<sup>3</sup> This might be true when the merit of the poems was known, but the author was quite unknown, and if the volume had appeared under the patronage of Newton, who had not the smallest authority with the literary world, the public of all classes would have assumed that the work was addressed to his narrow clique, and the big circle of readers would have been warned to let it alone. Cowper took the rational view. He had found Johnson, he said, "a very judicious man on other occasions," and was willing he should determine for him, in a case where he was bound by his occupation to understand what would promote the

<sup>1</sup> [To Newton, Sept. 18, 1781.]

<sup>2</sup> Hayley's *Life of Cowper*, vol. i. p. 338.

<sup>3</sup> Southey's *Life of Cowper*, *Works*, vol. i. p. 218.



sale of a book, and what would hinder it.<sup>1</sup> The proposed preface was therefore suppressed, when the book was on the eve of publication.

Cowper's patience was tried by the dilatoriness of the printer, but his work was fairly launched in March, 1782, and the man who attempted suicide from the dread of facing a few matter-of-fact questions at the bar of the House of Lords stood forth a voluntary and eager candidate for general applause. The balance of the "infinite share of ambition" and the "equal share of diffidence," which he confessed to Lady Hesketh that he had in his nature,<sup>2</sup> had hitherto kept him inactive, and he imagined, when his book was on the verge of publication, that his innate bashfulness would still have rendered it "impossible for him to commence author by name," if he had not been nearly indifferent whether he was praised or abused.<sup>3</sup> There did not, he protested, live the being who would be less annoyed by being chronicled as a dunce.<sup>4</sup> In this idea, as he afterwards acknowledged, he was completely deceived. Except in the periods when the pangs of despair swallowed up all his other emotions, "everything," to use his own words, "affected him nearly, which threatened to disappoint his favourite purpose of working his way through obscurity into notice."<sup>5</sup> However apathetic he might fancy himself before the die was cast, he really published because he thought well of his verse, and had an inward persuasion that it would procure him the distinction he coveted. His retirement, no doubt, assisted his courage. He could address the world from "the loopholes of his retreat," and as he did not mingle in the crowd he had little to fear from personal humiliation in the eyes of associates. The influence of this consideration appeared in his especial

<sup>1</sup> [To Unwin, Feb. 24, 1782; to Newton, Feb., 1782.]

<sup>2</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, May 15, 1786.]

<sup>3</sup> [To Newton, Nov. 7, 1781.]

<sup>4</sup> [To Unwin, Oct. 6, 1781.]

<sup>5</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, Dec. 19, 1787.]

anxiety for a favourable judgment upon his labours in the *Monthly Review*, on account of its being read by a carpenter, a baker, a village schoolmaster, and a watch-maker, in the place where he lived. "Every man," says Johnson, "has a lurking wish to appear considerable in his native place."<sup>1</sup> "Wherever else," Cowper exclaimed, "I am accounted dull, let me pass for a genius at Olney."<sup>2</sup> So much was he deluded when he sometimes fancied that he only cared for the commendations of the judicious.

Cowper sent his volume to Thurlow, now Lord Chancellor, and to Colman, manager of the Haymarket Theatre, with whom he had formerly been intimate. He was hurt that neither made any reply. He once said that he was "covetous, if ever man was, of living in the remembrance of absentees."<sup>3</sup> But he had voluntarily dropped nearly all his acquaintances when he left London, and the storm of 1763 had made a wreck of his friendships. When he published his *Poems* he had not communicated with Thurlow, by message or correspondence, for nearly twenty years. "He can do me no good," Cowper wrote to Unwin but added that he might "happen to do him a little." The volume was meant to be the vehicle of religious truth, which Cowper said he knew Thurlow to be ignorant of. "He has great abilities, but no religion."<sup>4</sup> But it was not adapted for the purpose of making a convert of a man insensible to other arguments. The fact, that the poems had in the main a religious aspect was a reason why Thurlow might not care to read them, and still more why he might feel it an awkwardness to write to their author about them. Cowper was especially mortified at Thurlow's neglect, because he expected him to do something for him. He attached undue importance to his old promise, made off-hand, in thoughtless youth, in a careless conversation,

<sup>1</sup> [Johnson to Reynolds, July 17, 1771, Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 224.]

<sup>2</sup> To Unwin, June 12, 1782.

<sup>3</sup> [To Rowley, Sept. 16, 1790.]

<sup>4</sup> To Unwin, Feb. 24, March 18, April 1, 1782.

and in reply to a demand. If it was as binding as Cowper imagined, he yet misinterpreted it. It was not a promise to support him by alms, but was made on the supposition that he would be qualified for some post, which he was not. Thurlow did not forget his friends. Those who were capable of posts were provided for by him. To ask the king for a pension was to ask him to maintain Cowper out of his income, as royal pensions were then paid from the royal purse. Cowper's volume of poetry did not warrant the demand, and under any circumstances it would have been a delicate matter for Thurlow to ask that his friend and panegyrist should be pensioned. The pertinacity with which Cowper continued to harp on Thurlow's fancied neglect was undignified. He himself allowed later that he was a man "not easily served, being fit for nothing in the world but to write verses."<sup>1</sup>

Cowper was fifty years old when he completed his first published volume of poems. The pieces he had composed in the preceding decade—a period of life when most men are in the maturity of their understandings—still gave little, and often no indication of the power which lurked within him. There is neither felicity of thought nor language in the copies of verses that he circulated among his friends, and what renders his failure more extraordinary is, that he endeavoured to put the whole of his strength into his work, and elaborated these trifles with the utmost care. Whatever was short he justly held should be nervous, masculine, and compact, and he was never weary of touching and retouching, that he might fulfil his theory of excellence.<sup>2</sup> "Nervous, masculine, and compact" are, however, the last epithets which could be applied to the feeble and jejune produce of all this toil. Even the rhymes, about which there could be no deception, are frequently wretched. He talked of a false rhyme disgracing a stanza,<sup>3</sup> and at a subsequent date he gave

<sup>1</sup> To Rowley, Feb. 1, 1790.  
To Newton, May 13, 1781.

<sup>2</sup> [To Unwin, July 2, 1780.]



it as a reason for retouching John Gilpin that there was this fault in one of the verses.<sup>1</sup> Yet in the first stanza of his first Olney hymn he makes *God* rhyme to *road*, and *frame* rhyme to *Lamb*. In another hymn, entitled "The House of Prayer," we have in the course of five stanzas such rhymes as these—*secure, door; place, praise; crowd, would; gives, thieves*.

In the Olney hymns, indeed, the poet occasionally breaks out; but the greater part of his sacred strains consist of religious truisms, which are so prosaic in expression and so deficient in metrical finish, that he more often lowers than elevates his theme. His hymns are the representation of his personal feelings, of his changing religious moods, whether sorrowful or joyful. Wordsworth wrote to Alford, February 28, 1844, "I am far too advanced in life to venture upon anything so difficult to do as hymns of devotion."<sup>2</sup> Cowper's notions of what was fitting for a hymn were of a humbler kind. He seems to have held the opinion that any religious sentiment was inspiration sufficient, however bald the language, and however feeble the flow of verse. He did not feel, at least in his own compositions, that the loftier the theme, the less we can tolerate that it should be turned into commonplace rhymes, which debase the thoughts they should invest with new power and beauty. Many of his hymns

<sup>1</sup> To Unwin, Nov. 1, 1784. Perhaps he did not revise the poem as he intended, for two false rhymes remain, and one of the two is probably that to which he referred in writing to Unwin. In the third stanza "pair" rhymes to "repair," and it is usually held that the rhyme is not legitimate when the two terminations are identical, though there are many instances of the blemish in Pope's Homer. But a worse rhyme is that in the language of the Callender to Gilpin, when "shall" rhymes to "all." Walker, in his Pronouncing Dictionary, under "Shall," says, "Children are generally taught to pronounce this word so as to rhyme with *all*, and when they are fixed in this pronunciation, and come to read tolerably, they have this sound to break themselves of, and pronounce it like the first syllable of *shallow*." Perhaps the youthful pronunciation made it seem passable to Cowper, but he was so tolerant of such flaws that mere convenience may have been cause enough for him.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoir of Wordsworth*, vol. ii. p. 406.

hardly rise to mediocrity, very few are above it, and the best are not of first-rate excellence. They abound in self-reproaches, but are by no means free from language which borders on presumption. Some of them, from his inadequate or incongruous modes of expression, must even appear irreverent, except in intention, to reverent minds. They were written when he was forty years old and upwards, and none could have suspected that, at so mature an age, they could have proceeded from a man who had minutely studied, with keen appreciation, the greatest Greek, Latin, and English poets, much less from one who, a little later, would produce works which would entitle him to be ranked among the masters of the craft.

In his new volume he took a wider sweep, and his vigour increased with the demands which were made upon it. Yet *Table Talk*, and its seven companion poems in the heroic measure, have many of the faults of his previous efforts. The verse is rather rhetorical than poetic, and with several vigorous, and some felicitous passages and lines, are more which do not rise above good and fluent English. His poetry in the heroic metre has not the freedom, vigour, and polish of Dryden's. It is only in places that he rises to the level of the greatest masters.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There is a fine character of Chatham in *Table Talk*—

In him Demosthenes was heard again,  
 Liberty taught him her Athenian strain,  
 She clothed him with authority and awe,  
 Spoke from his lips, and in his looks gave law.  
 His speech, his form, his action, full of grace,  
 And all his country beaming in his face,  
 He stood, as some inimitable hand  
 Would strive to make a Saul or Tully stand.  
 No sycophant or slave, that dared oppose  
 Her sacred cause, but trembled when he rose.  
 And every venal stickler for the yoke  
 Felt himself crushed at the first word he spoke.

Lines 342 to 353.

In *Conversation* the following is one of the best passages. The portrait is

The style was borrowed from Churchill; the matter was of the kind common to numberless writers both in verse and prose. He wrote nevertheless with an independent mind, and there is an individuality in the poems which makes them distinctive, but it is not sufficient to constitute originality.

Cowper's mind revolted from the artificial school of Pope, which had long been in vogue, and he preferred the ease and elasticity of Dryden. He had been confirmed in this taste by the careless and forcible effusions of his early associate Churchill. The defects which arose from haste in the latter were copied by Cowper with design. He carried freedom to the point of slovenliness, and in the resolution to be natural and unconstrained, he often became flimsy and diffuse. He says, in *Table Talk*, that according to "modern taste," verse "without a creamy smoothness has no charms," that "manner is all in all," "the substitute for genius, sense, and wit."<sup>1</sup> He went

well drawn in distinctive, forcible language. It would be interesting to know who the person was.

Oh ! I have seen (nor hope perhaps in vain,  
Ere life go down, to see such sights again)  
A veteran warrior in the Christian field,  
Who never saw the sword he could not wield ;  
Grave without dullness, learned without pride,  
Exact, yet not precise, though meek, keen-eyed ;  
A man that would have foiled at their own play  
A dozen would-bes of the modern day ;  
Who when occasion justified its use,  
Had wit as bright as ready to produce,  
Could fetch from records of an earlier age,  
Or from philosophy's enlightened page,  
His rich materials, and regale your ear  
With strains it was a privilege to hear ;  
Yet, above all, his luxury supreme,  
And his chief glory, was the Gospel theme ;  
There he was copious as old Greece or Rome,  
His happy eloquence seemed there at home,  
Ambitious, not to shine or to excel,  
But to treat justly what he loved so well.

Lines 605 to 624.

<sup>1</sup> *Table Talk*, lines 510 to 543.



so far in the opposite direction as to adopt the opinion that rugged lines were essential to give variety, and his ear was less pained by discord than by sustained sweetness. He failed to attain to the quality for which he made such sacrifices, for in seeking to avoid a monotony of polish he fell into a monotony of negligence. After reading the expression of his belief that no inaccuracy will be found in his rhymes and numbers, and his protestations that he never suffered a single verse to pass till he had rendered it as perfect as he was able,<sup>1</sup> it is not a little surprising to meet with a specimen like this, in which he is speaking of heaven:—

And is it not a mortifying thought  
The poor should have it, and the rich should not?<sup>2</sup>

Here he has dispensed altogether with rhyme in favour of a commonplace idea, clothed in the tamest possible language. In other instances he has preserved the rhyme, but has purchased it by eking out his couplet with unmeaning expletives, as in the example which follows:—

The Frenchman first in literary fame—  
Mention him, if you please : Voltaire?—the same.<sup>3</sup>

No other part of the piece is in dialogue, and the deformity of the paltry second line is increased by the forced expedient of supposing the reader suddenly to break in with a question, and, having asked it, to anticipate the reply by answering it himself. His notions of melody were not violated by such a verse as—

Endur'st the brunt, and dar'st defy them all ;<sup>4</sup>  
or by the couplet in which, describing the Jews, he says:—

Thy temple, once thy glory, fallen and rased,  
And thou a worshipper e'en where thou mayst.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [To Newton, Sept. 18, 1782. He says of the little pieces he published in the first volume of poems, "Though perhaps the exactest rhymes may not be required in these lighter pieces, I yet choose to be as regular in this particular as I can"; and he had therefore rewritten half a stanza. To Johnson, Jan. 31, 1882.]

<sup>2</sup> [*Truth*, lines 339, 340.]

<sup>3</sup> [*Truth*, lines 303, 304.]

<sup>4</sup> [*Expostulation*, line 697.]

<sup>5</sup> [*Expostulation*, lines 259, 260.]

If these had been occasional blemishes, they would have been of no great consequence; but he never proceeds far without lines which are prosaic both in sound and language, without forced or false rhymes, and without feeble amplifications which hardly rise to the level of ordinary talk. In aiming at the familiarity of easy elegance and of idiomatic liveliness, he constantly sinks into a loose, tame, diluted style, which offends alike the ear and the understanding. The works of Churchill are little read, because, with a diffused power which attests the vigour of his mind, his individual passages have not often that condensed and signal excellence which causes them to live in the memory. The natural tendency of Cowper was towards the error of his predecessor, and he took him for his model for the very reason that he ought to have shunned his example.

The main object of the poems was to recommend Christianity and denounce vice. They are moral and religious essays in rhyme. "Table Talk" is so called only because it is a dialogue between A and B, and bears little resemblance to the common idea of table talk. A, who does not represent Cowper, says little, and B descants in a didactic fashion on the blessings of freedom, the evils of demagogic license and national laxity, closing with his view of poetry and poets. The sentiments are such as any man of common sense might express off-hand. There is considerable sameness in the sentiments of some of the pieces, and the thoughts are in general more remarkable for their truth than for their profundity. He endeavoured to be facetious as well as serious. "I am merry," he wrote, "that I may decoy people into my company, and grave that they may be the better for it."<sup>1</sup> He did not succeed in his effort to harmonise the ludicrous and the solemn. The dignified parts are marred by their juxtaposition with a jocularly which is by no means refined. His humour in his letters is graceful and original. In his poems, with the

<sup>1</sup> [To Newton, Feb. 18, 1781.]

famous exception of John Gilpin, it is mostly common, flat, and sometimes even vulgar. He plays with themes which are not a proper subject for jest, and which could least of all be supposed a matter of mirth to him. He condemns the ancient prude to perdition, and after telling her that she will be sentenced for her "sanctimonious pride" to the same place with such offenders in the like kind as hermits and Brahmins, adds :—

Nay, never frown,  
But, if you please, some fathoms lower down.<sup>1</sup>

This sorry piece of pleasantry was written at the time when he believed that he was doomed by an irreversible decree to depths as low as those to which he consigned, with mock-civility, the self-righteous old maid. With these drawbacks, the poems contain many passages of remarkable vigour. He is sparing of imagery, and his beauties consist in general of pure and unadorned English, just and earnest sentiments, and a native strength which is not impaired by affectation or any straining after effect. The lines in which he characterises slavery are a brief specimen of the force which distinguished his better strains :—

All other sorrows Virtue may endure,  
And find submission more than half a cure ;  
But slav'ry !—Virtue dreads it as her grave ;  
Patience itself is meanness in a slave.<sup>2</sup>

As the feebler parts preponderated, the volume had only a moderate success, nor is there any reason to think, if he had stopped at this point, that his reputation would have increased with time. His case is curious. He had been a versifier nearly all his life. By his own confession he had spared no pains to do his best. At the age of fifty, when further improvement was unlikely, he put forth several thousand lines, which by turns were grave and gay, and which seemed to reflect every quality of his mind. Had he died at this period, nobody could have suspected that

<sup>1</sup> *Truth*, lines 169, 170.

<sup>2</sup> *Charity*, lines 157, 158 ; 163, 164.



an undeveloped genius had been taken prematurely from the world, and that he possessed a poetical power of a far different stamp from anything which he had hitherto exhibited. His letters indeed, if they had been published, would have ensured his celebrity. They have never the air of being composed, and yet are as elegant and classic as the most finished compositions. His humour, like his style, was spontaneous and delightful, and imparts a flavour to an infinity of trifles which in themselves would have been insipid. He never exaggerates for the sake of effect. Every word bears the impress of truth. He did not aim at conciseness, nor does he deal much in reflections, opinions, and criticisms. He never grew into an exact and consistent thinker; and, for a man of his general intelligence, the flaws in his reasoning are sometimes amazing. But he confines himself mainly to the little incidents and feelings of the hour, and these he tells with a charm and distinctness which are unequalled in any other familiar correspondence. With all the beauty of these graceful effusions, he had no expectation that they would contribute to his fame; for he begged his correspondents to burn them, and would have been dismayed at the idea of exposing the confidences of friendship to the eye of the world.<sup>1</sup> His earliest epistles are as perfect as his latest, and he would almost seem to have been born a letter-writer, and to have been made a poet.

<sup>1</sup> To Lady Hesketh, July 5, 1788. ["I admire your new way to pay off old scores, and to save yourself from the Royal Durance, alias the King's Bench, by printing my letters. You have my free permission to do it, but not till I am dead. No, nor even then, till you have given them a complete revisal, erasing all that the critics in such matters would condemn. In which case, my dear, thou wilt reduce thy noble to nine pence, and must take thy seat in a gaol at last."]

## [CHAPTER VII]

COWPER'S life was divided into marked periods. He spent his time in amusement and literature till the attack of insanity which drove him from London. Then he wholly abandoned literature, and gave himself up to religion till the great Olney attack. Then, excluded from religion, he took to successive mechanical employments. Then, at last, he took to writing poetry, when he was past fifty. Even then nothing in the workings of his mind revealed to him the true bent of his poetic faculty: he learnt it by accident. In the summer of 1781 Lady Austen was staying with her sister, Mrs. Jones, the wife of a clergyman, who lived in the vicinity of Olney. The poet was on visiting terms with the Joneses, and chancing to see Lady Austen in their company when he was looking out of his window, he was so struck with her appearance, that he sent Mrs. Unwin to invite them to tea. His first impression was confirmed. He was charmed with his new acquaintance, an immediate intimacy ensued, and she was shortly known to him by the endearing title of "Sister Anne." She was a woman of quick sensibilities, had "high spirits, a lively fancy, and great readiness of conversation."<sup>1</sup> Her vivacity was tempered by a solid understanding and a moral worth, which "induced us both," says Cowper, "in spite of that cautious reserve that marks our characters, to trust her, to love and value her, and to open our hearts for her reception."<sup>2</sup> So sprightly, so intelligent, and so affectionate a companion was like new life to the lonely hypochondriac. To go into her society was to step out of gloom into sunshine, and his dark musings vanished under the influence of her contagious cheerfulness. Anxious to perpetuate the

<sup>1</sup> [To Unwin, Aug. 25, 1781.]<sup>2</sup> [To Unwin, Feb. 9, 1782.]

blessing, he encouraged her to take lodgings in the vicarage house, which was only occupied in part by the curate. Thither she removed in 1782, and there Cowper visited her every morning after breakfast, and there he and Mrs. Unwin dined with her every alternate day. The intervening days were not lost to friendship, for the sole difference was that Lady Austen dined with them. His lively friend was an enthusiastic admirer of blank verse. She urged him to attempt it, and he promised to comply if she would furnish the subject. "Oh!" she exclaimed, "you can never be in want of a subject; you can write upon anything; write upon this sofa." The conversation passed in the summer of 1783, and in October, 1784, "The Task," which took its name from the incident which gave rise to it, was in the hands of the printer. Neither the author nor the "muse" who suggested the topic could have foreseen to what it was to lead. It was a blind and lucky hit. Here was a man, driven into retirement by a fit of madness, and remaining mad,—that is, the victim of a delusion,—to the close of his life, giving himself up to religion of the evangelical school which was not that of profound thought, reading only an occasional book for amusement, and from shyness declining all society, occupied almost exclusively with gardening, carpentering, taming hares, and winding worsted and thread for Mrs. Unwin's knittings, or making nets himself to protect fruit from birds. At the age of fifty he is put upon versifying, and still later has a theme given him upon such an unpromising subject as a sofa, when this theme grows into that Task, which has been the admiration of numbers who had the subtlest sense of what was beautiful in poetry. He wrote an immortal poem because he was not equal to anything else.

Cowper was not one of the poets who drew his ideas from the realms of imagination. He rarely attempted to conjure up situations which he had not experienced, nor



did he ransack his mind for images and sentiments which did not make part of his common thoughts. The perfect knowledge we have of the man, of his amiable disposition, and his pathetic story, have added to the charm of his writings. His poetry and his life react upon each other. If it is his verse which gives importance to his biography, his biography increases the interest which attaches to his verse. His works were the counterpart of the ordinary, everyday man. In *Table Talk* and its companion pieces he had made, he said, his "confession of faith."<sup>1</sup> He had poured out in them the theological and moral opinions which had governed him for years, and he seemed to have nothing to add. If he had been reminded that half the story was untold, and that, to complete the portraiture, he might follow up the promulgation of his creed with a description of his indoor and outdoor occupations, of the walks he habitually trod, and the scenes upon which he incessantly gazed, interspersed with such reflections as they were wont to excite, he would probably have shrunk from so personal a topic. He was insensibly led to execute a plan which he would not have framed upon deliberation, by the happy chance that he was set versifying upon an object which plunged him into the midst of his home pursuits. He commenced by treating of the *Sofa* in a playful, mock-heroic strain.<sup>2</sup> The use of the

<sup>1</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, undated, about 1786.]

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey says, "There is something very undignified, to say no worse of them, in the protracted parodies and mock-heroic passages with which he seeks to enliven some of his greatest productions. The *Sofa*, for instance, in the *Task* is but a feeble imitation of the *Splendid Shilling*." (*Essays*, vol. i. p. 413.) It is not a "feeble imitation," for it is superior to Phillips in verse, in language, and in the better proportion which is kept between the matter and the manner. Cowper, from his way of mentioning it, seems to have admired the poem :

And in thy numbers, Phillips, shines for aye,  
The solitary Shilling.—*The Task*, book iii. v. 455.

But it is a paltry production. The burlesque, however, had many admirers, and among the number was Gilbert White, who, in his *Natural History of Selborne*, Letter 45, speaks of the "delicate but quaint humour peculiar to the

sofa as a couch for invalids suggested to him the pleasures of health, exercise, and activity. This once set him dilating upon the beauties of nature, which no man regarded with a more observant eye, or enjoyed with a more intelligent delight. He was now fairly engaged in depicting the ordinary tenor of his life at Olney, and he did not stop till he had traversed the entire round. The apparent dulness of his existence, its narrow range, its unbroken uniformity, the absence of events, and the unromantic character of the neighbouring scenery, appeared to present no very promising field for poetry to a man whose habit was to describe things as they were, without any embellishment from fancy. But the materials for poetry exist always and everywhere, if only literary culture and genius exist to turn them into account. And, in fact, the commonness of the subjects rendered the sympathies associated with them only the more universal. Fireside enjoyments, domestic happiness, English landscapes, and English winters, were topics which, when touched by the hand of a master, appealed to the experience of millions. It added to the charm that the author spoke in his own name, and thus gave life and reality to the whole,—a biographic as well as a poetic interest. "My descriptions," he said, "are all from nature: not one of them second-hand. My delineations of the heart are from my own experience: not one of them borrowed from books, or in the least degree conjectural."<sup>1</sup> The religious,

author of the *Splendid Shilling*." The title, better known than the poem itself, has sometimes been a text for humour in others. Sir Robert Grant used to call six handsome Miss Twopennys the *Splendid Shilling*.

<sup>1</sup> To Unwin, Oct. 10, 1784. His personal tastes and pursuits were expressed in the *Task*. Passages in it are constantly reflected in his letters. Thus, he says:—

Not distant far, a length of Colonnade  
Invites us. Monument of ancient taste,  
Now scorned, but worthy of a better fate.

Book i. lines 252-4.

To Lady Hesketh he writes, July 28, 1788, of the lime-walk at Weston, "These are the things which our modern improvers of parks and pleasure

social, and political opinions interspersed were all upon the side of truth, goodness, and humanity, and were such opinions as might be expected from an amiable recluse, whose judgment was not warped by the prepossessions which are generated by self-interest or by party and personal ties. They are not manufactured or artificial, but are the everyday thoughts of a tender, tranquil, contemplative mind, which sympathised with everything that was good, lovely, wise, and merciful. He does not see nature or events through the medium of his morbid melancholy, but as they are in themselves, and he has a keen eye for whatever is most beautiful and attractive in the world around him. It is only the vices of men that arouse his indignation.

grounds have displaced without mercy, because, forsooth, they are rectilinear ! It is a wonder they do not quarrel with the sunbeams for the same reason."

The description of the winter evening—

Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,  
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,  
So let us welcome peaceful evening in—

(Book iv. lines 35-41)

finds its echo in a letter to Hill, October 20, 1783, "I see the winter approaching without much concern, though a passionate lover of fine weather and the pleasant scenes of summer ; but the long evenings have their comforts too, and there is hardly to be found upon the earth, I suppose, so snug a creature as an Englishman by his fireside in the winter."

His imagination was so strong that even scenes which he had not witnessed were described from his "own experience." In his delineation of the traveller, he says :—

He travels, and I, too, I tread the deck,  
Ascend his topmast, through his peering eyes  
Discover countries, with a kindred heart  
Suffer his woes, and share in his escapes.

Book iv. lines 114-17.

In acknowledging to Newton, October 6, 1783, the receipt of Hawkesworth's *Voyages*, he writes, "I am much obliged for the *Voyages*, which I received, and began to read last night. My imagination is so captivated upon these occasions that I seem to partake with the navigators in all the dangers they encountered. I lose my anchor ; my mainsail is rent into shreds ; I kill a shark ; and by signs converse with a Patagonian ; and all this without moving from the fireside." In February, 1784, he had written "four books, and part of a fifth." (To Bull, Feb. 22, 1784.) The lines, "He travels," etc., were therefore probably suggested by the reading of Hawkesworth's *Voyages*, and written at the same time as the passage in the letter to Newton.



The execution of the delightful design is for the most part nearly perfect. He has displayed one quality in a stronger degree than it was ever possessed by any other describer of nature—the capacity of painting scenes with a distinctness which makes them like visible objects to the mind. They are not more vivid than true, and he has blended the accuracy of the topographer with the picturesqueness of the poet. His modes of expression are according to the rules afterwards upheld by Wordsworth. All stiff, pedantic, conventional forms are rejected. His verse is pure, straightforward, unaffected English throughout. The language is no longer of the commonplace character which is so often found in his previous works, but is as choice as it is simple. Nothing in the Task is more remarkable than the skill with which he constantly picks out the one felicitous word in the tongue which conveys his meaning with the happiest effect. The sketch he gives in the Winter Evening of the appearance of the landscape before snow, and of the fall of the “fleecy shower” itself,<sup>1</sup> is one instance out of many of his wonderful faculty for picturesque delineation. The whole indeed of the fourth book, which is his masterpiece, abounds both in outdoor and indoor scenes of magical power. Like all works of consummate excellence, the impression of its greatness increases with prolonged acquaintance. The beauties are of the tranquil and not of the exciting kind, and the exquisiteness of the workmanship is easily overlooked by hasty eyes. He was accused of neglecting method in its structure, but retorted that he was conscious of having given to its several parts “that sort of slight connection which poetry demands.”<sup>2</sup> His reprobation of the vices and follies of his age is sometimes admirable, but sometimes declamatory, flat, and tedious; and where he aspires to be sublime, as in the description of the earthquake in Sicily,<sup>3</sup> he is grandiloquent without true force or spirit. His ear

<sup>1</sup> [Book iv. line 326.]

<sup>2</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, July 28, 1788.]

<sup>3</sup> [Book ii. lines 75 seq.]

for blank verse was much finer than for the heroic measure; and though it has not the swelling fulness nor the variety of Milton, it is limpid and harmonious, and suited to the subjects of which he treats.

As the Task is one of the most charming poems in the world, so it is also among the most original. The blank verse is in a certain degree framed upon Milton's, but the familiarity of the themes necessitated modifications, and there is no servile imitation. "Mimicry," Cowper said, was his "abhorrence,"<sup>1</sup> and he at one time avoided reading verse for fear he should be betrayed into unconscious imitation.<sup>2</sup> He wrote to Unwin, in 1781, that he had not read an English poet for thirteen years, and but one for twenty.<sup>3</sup> He states, however, that the poets of "established reputation" remained as fresh in his memory as when they were the companions of his youth;<sup>4</sup> and nobody can fail to perceive how much he had been influenced in his descriptions of nature by the Seasons of Thomson. He outstrips his predecessor. The proportion in him of what is good is larger, and his good passages are in general of a higher grade of excellence. His language is more select and felicitous, his metre is more musical, his scenes are more picturesque, and his topics are more various.<sup>5</sup> The Winter of Thomson, which is his noblest production, will not stand a comparison as a whole with the Winter Evening of Cowper.

His feelings about the reception of the Task were not the same as when he published his first volume of poems. Now he was indifferent to the opinion of the world. "It is become," he said to Newton, August 6, 1785, "as un-

<sup>1</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, May 25, 1786.]

<sup>2</sup> [To Unwin, Nov. 24, 1781; to Hill, Nov. 23, 1783.]

<sup>3</sup> [To Unwin, *Ibid.*]

<sup>4</sup> [To Unwin, quoted by Southey, vol. i. p. 331.]

<sup>5</sup> Cowper wrote to Mrs. King, June 19, 1788, "Thomson was admirable in description; but it always seemed to me that there was somewhat of affectation in his style, and that his numbers are sometimes not well harmonised."

important to me as the whistling of a bird in a bush." He had written it solely to amuse himself when oppressed with misery.<sup>1</sup> He was a small talker, and said he never gave "much more than half" his attention to what was started by others, and very rarely started anything himself. Verse was his favourite occupation, for its composition attracted attention to itself.<sup>2</sup> He found that "melancholy did not affect the operations of his mind on any subject to which he could attach it."<sup>3</sup> When he became insane upon one point,—his religion,—Southey remarks that he recovered his intellectual powers on all others.<sup>4</sup> He "produced many things," according to his own testimony, "under the influence of despair, which hope would not have permitted to spring."<sup>5</sup> He wrote both the *Task* and the volume which preceded it when he was "supremely unhappy."<sup>6</sup> "Had you known," he wrote to Lady Hesketh, January 10, 1786, "in what anguish of mind I wrote the whole of that poem!"

It speaks well for the taste of the day that the *Task* became immediately popular. Johnson, the publisher, told Rogers "that, in consequence of the great number of copies which had been sold, he had made a handsome present to the author."<sup>7</sup> In the same volume appeared another piece which was already famous. This was the *History of John Gilpin*, which was printed for the first time in the *Public Advertiser* towards the close of 1782. It was here again Lady Austen who prompted him. She had known the story from her childhood, and related it to him one evening when he was suffering under more than ordinary dejection. He continued to break out in convulsions of laughter after he retired to bed, and his merriment not permitting him to

<sup>1</sup> [To Mrs. King, Feb. 12, 1788.]

<sup>2</sup> [To Newton, March 19, 1784.]

<sup>3</sup> To Mrs. King, April 11, 1788.

<sup>4</sup> Southey's *Correspondence with C. Bowles*, p. 339.

<sup>5</sup> To Newton, April 22, 1785.

<sup>6</sup> To Newton, Oct. 30, 1784; to Lady Hesketh, Jan. 16, 1786.

<sup>7</sup> Dyce's *Table Talk of Rogers*, p. 133.



sleep, he turned the incidents into verse. From the effect which the tale had upon him it may be presumed that he owed the comical details as well as the outline to his friend, and that he did little more than supply the language and the metre. Nothing can be happier than the manner in which he has dressed up the diverting mishaps which befall the London shopkeeper, who, with all the confidence of inexperience, unconscious of the difficulty, attempts to ride on horseback when he has never ridden before. The good humour with which Cowper has endowed his "knight of the stone bottles" imparts an additional air of hilarity to the ballad.

When Betty screaming, came downstairs,  
"The wine is left behind,"

a less amiable man would have broken out into angry exclamations at the neglect of his wife.

"Good lack!" quoth he, "yet bring it me,"

is all the vexation which John expresses, and he evinces the same beaming, easy disposition at every stage of his disasters. The ludicrous sallies of Cowper were by his own account a violent effort to turn aside his thoughts from the gloom which overwhelmed him;<sup>1</sup> but however low his spirits might be by nature, he had equally by nature a strong vein of pleasantry, which was too habitual to be always the result of determination.

Before the Task was finished the friendship with the lady who suggested it was dissolved. It continued till the summer of 1784, when the poet, during her absence, wrote her a letter, in which, with many expressions of tender regret, he broke off the intimacy. His reason for this step was the supposition of Lady Austen that his love meant marriage. He had addressed "Sister Anne" some affectionate verses; and Hayley, who received his information from herself, says that, though it is not the

<sup>1</sup> "The grinners at John Gilpin little dream what the author sometimes suffers. How I hated myself yesterday for having ever wrote it!"—To Lady Hesketh, Dec. 11, 1786.

inference he should have drawn, she might "be easily pardoned, if she was induced by them to hope that they might possibly be a prelude to a still dearer alliance."<sup>1</sup> The letter in which Cowper put an end to this expectation was burnt by the disappointed lady, in a moment of vexation, but she spoke of its contents to Hayley, who expressly declares that it would have exhibited "a proof that, animated by the warmest admiration for the great poet, she was willing to devote her life and fortune to his service and protection."<sup>2</sup>

Alexander Knox wrote to Bishop Jebb, October, 1806, "I have rather a severer idea of Lady A[usten] than I should wish to put into writing for publication. I almost suspect she was a very artful woman." Knox must have meant that Lady Austen was endeavouring to entrap Cowper into a marriage. But there could be no plainer dealing. She loved Cowper, and believed that Cowper loved her. She doubtless supposed that he was too diffident to speak, or even would have despaired of being accepted, and resolved to let him know her real feelings towards him. Deceived by her frequent power to dispel his melancholy by her vivacity, she probably underrated the extent of his malady, and imagined that, if she married him, she could keep him in good spirits. Love alone could have influenced her. She had nothing otherwise to gain. She had an independent fortune; Cowper was poor, and the little he had he derived from the charitable contributions of relations. He was a recluse, and by no possibility could he have been brought to mingle in society. His credit as a poet, which indeed was small when she conceived her attachment for him, could have conferred no social distinction upon her. She must have shut herself up with him, content with his companionship, which was that of a man who, more often than not, was sunk in gloom.

<sup>1</sup> [Hayley's *Life of Cowper*, vol ii. p. 128.]

<sup>2</sup> [*Ibid.*, p. 127.]

It is certain that Cowper, on his part, had never entertained the notion of matrimony. He had contracted obligations towards Mrs. Unwin which must have precluded the idea, even if no other objection had existed. For twenty years she had waited upon him with a tender assiduity of which women alone are capable, spending her health in his service, and never wearying of her mournful task. In his repeated fits of dejection she could hardly venture to leave him for a moment, night or day,<sup>1</sup> and her "poor bark," he said, was shattered by being tossed so long by the side of his own.<sup>2</sup> Lady Hesketh never recovered the effects of a winter which she spent with him during one of his attacks. Lovable as he was from his genius and disposition, the exhaustion of body and spirit which the attendance upon him involved would have tired out any person who had not carried friendship to the pitch of devotion. Instead of being, as he was, among the worthiest of men, he must have been a monster of ingratitude if he could have been so little touched by Mrs. Unwin's self-sacrifice and affection as to desert her in her age for a newly discovered acquaintance, and leave her to solitude and neglect. Neither is there the slightest reason to suppose that, apart from his sense of duty, he would have given the preference to her rival. In conversation Lady Austen was more brilliant than Mrs. Unwin, but the most dazzling are seldom the most valuable qualities, and the fascinations which were a pleasing supplement to existence would have ill supplied the place of the endurance, the meekness, the sterling sense, and sympathetic tastes of his old and faithful ally. Her character has been drawn by Lady Hesketh, who says of her, that she loved him as well as one human being could love another, that she had no will or shadow of inclination that was not his, and that she went through her almost incredible fatigues with an air of ease which took away every appearance of hardship. Notwithstanding her trials, she preserved a

<sup>1</sup> To Lady Hesketh, Jan. 18, 1787.

<sup>2</sup> [To Newton, Oct. 2, 1787.]



great fund of gaiety, and laughed upon the smallest provocation. Her knowledge and intelligence were both considerable. She was well read in the poets, and had a true taste for what was excellent in literature. Cowper had the highest opinion of her judgment. He submitted all his writings to her criticism, and asserted that she had a perception of what was good and bad in composition that he never knew deceive her. He always abided by her decision, altered where she condemned, and, if she approved, had no fear that anybody else could find fault with reason.<sup>1</sup> Such a rare combination of merits was not likely, with a person of Cowper's disposition, to be cast into the shade by the cleverness, vivacity, and personal charms of Lady Austen. It was to Mrs. Unwin's "affectionate care" of him for the "greater part of twenty years," he said in 1785, that it was owing that he lived at all.<sup>2</sup> "What and where," he wrote to Lady Hesketh, "had I been without her?"<sup>3</sup> He proved, indeed, by his conduct a few years later, that his attachment to his admirable "Mary" was as deep as hers had been to him, and that he realised in practice the beautiful ideal which he had drawn of friendship in his Valediction, where he describes it as a "union of hearts without a flaw between."

### [CHAPTER VIII]

THE literary fame of Cowper caused some of his friends and relations, who supposed him lost to themselves and the world, to reopen their intercourse with him. Foremost among the number was his cousin Lady Hesketh. Their correspondence had been suspended for nearly nineteen years, when she once more addressed him in October, 1785. He was transported with pleasure at the renewal

<sup>1</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, March 18, 1782.]

<sup>2</sup> The same, Oct. 12, 1785.

<sup>3</sup> The same, June 12, 1786.

of his intimacy with this dear companion of his youth. His letters to her thenceforth overflow with fondness, and were only interrupted by her annual visits to him. She went to Olney in June, 1786, and was lodged in the rooms which Lady Austen had vacated at the vicarage. Never did the poet look forward to any event with more eager delight than to the anticipated meeting, and the reality did not belie his expectations. Her company, he said, was a cordial of which he should feel the effect as long as he lived.

Her arrival brought with it another advantage. Cowper had become friendly with the Throckmortons, a Roman Catholic family, who lived at the pretty village of Weston, about a mile from Olney. They had a house to let, which was commodious in itself, and had the additional recommendation that it adjoined their own pleasure-grounds, "where a slipper would not be soiled even in winter,"<sup>1</sup> and where in summer avenues of limes and elms afforded a delicious shade. Of all the places within his range it was the one which the poet preferred for its beauties, but it was rendered inaccessible to him in bad weather by the intervening road of mud, and in sultry weather "he was fatigued before he reached it, and when he reached had not time to enjoy it."<sup>2</sup> Though the Throckmortons were anxious to have him for a tenant for the sake of his society, and he was equally anxious to embrace the offer for the sake of their walks and prospects, as well as their company, his inability to bear the expense of furnishing would not permit him to entertain the project. No sooner did Lady Hesketh appear upon the scene than she insisted upon defraying the cost of the removal; and November saw her cousin comfortably housed in the "Lodge" at Weston. He had not shifted his quarters before it was necessary. The ceilings of his miserable tenement at Olney were cracked, the walls were crumbling; and when a shoemaker and a publican proposed after his departure

<sup>1</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, May 8, 1786.]

<sup>2</sup> [The same, May 1, 1786.]

to share it between them, the village carpenter pronounced that unless it was propped they would inhabit it at the hazard of their lives.<sup>1</sup> Once the poet returned to take a look at his old tottering dwelling. "Never," he says, "did I see so forlorn and woeful a spectacle."<sup>2</sup> Cold, dreary, dirty, and ruinous, it seemed unfit to be the abode of human beings. His eyes notwithstanding had filled with tears when he first bid adieu to it, for he remembered how often he had enjoyed there in happier days a sense of the presence of God, and that now, as he supposed, he had lost it for ever.<sup>3</sup>

Any gratification which may have been produced by the removal to Weston was quickly dispelled. He had not been there above two or three weeks when Mr. Unwin caught a fever and died. Cowper spoke of the loss with calmness in his letters; and, affectionate and united as the friends had always been, they met so seldom, that the event could have left little void in his life. Mrs. Unwin bore her heavier share in the calamity with the resignation she had acquired from prolonged trials and habitual piety; but, depressed herself, she must have been less equal than usual to cheering her companion, and the deeper gloom which overshadowed him may have been the cause of the fresh attack of lunacy which shortly after supervened. There is a gap in his correspondence from January 18 to July 24, 1787; and he passed the interval in a state of almost total insanity. As in his two previous attacks, he attempted suicide. He hanged himself, and was only saved by the accident of Mrs. Unwin coming in before he was dead and cutting him down.

When he recovered he informed Mr. Newton that for thirteen years he had believed him not to be the friend he loved, but somebody else. He considered it at least one beneficial effect of his illness that it had released him from this disagreeable suspicion, and that he no longer

<sup>1</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, Dec. 11, 1786.]

<sup>2</sup> [To Newton, Dec. 16, 1786.]      <sup>3</sup> [The same, Nov. 17, 1786.]



doubted the identity of his old familiar companion, nor was compelled to act a deceitful part when he addressed him.<sup>1</sup> No limits can be placed to the hallucinations of a disordered understanding; and it would be possible in the nature of things that, when he emerged from the visitation of 1773, he might fancy, in spite of the evidence of his senses, that the pastor at the vicarage was a mockery and a cheat, and only the outward semblance of the genuine man. In this case, however, it is certain that no such delusion had existed, and that the impression was a chimera engendered by the disease of 1787. After Mr. Newton settled in London Cowper wrote to him once a fortnight, or oftener, and his letters have none of the constraint which the alleged conviction must have produced. They are, on the contrary, peculiarly confidential. They chiefly turn upon those fearful secrets of his heart which he would have been the least willing to lay bare to a stranger, and display throughout a strong attachment and a reverential regard. They have not the same playfulness as his sportive epistles to Mr. Unwin, but this was because he thought it due to the apostolical character of Mr. Newton to abstain from trifling. Religion had been the original bond of their intimacy; and when the poet ceased to partake of the consolations of Christianity, the point of sympathy was not changed, though the instrument sent forth a melancholy, instead of a cheerful sound. He poured his spiritual grief, as he had once poured his spiritual joys, into the ears of his confessor, and told him that to converse with him, even upon paper, was the most delightful of all employments, since it helped to make things seem as they had been. He would not have penned these words if he had believed that he was addressing an impostor, any more than he would have signified to him, as he did, the extreme satisfaction he had derived from his society when this honoured friend came to stay with him at Olney. He gave practical

<sup>1</sup> [To Newton, Oct. 2, 1787.]

proofs of the sincerity of his professions when he submitted his first volume of poems to Mr. Newton's revision, asked him to write the preface, and requested that he would allow his name to appear on the title-page as editor. His habitual words and acts all alike discountenance the idea that in his more lucid years his madness was carried to the pitch of discrediting the identity of one of his dearest intimates. It was a retrospective notion created and fixed in his mind during his latest fit of frenzy.

It was fortunate for the poet that before his attack he had embarked in an occupation which engaged without trying his faculties, and which assisted to promote his returning convalescence. When he had completed the Task he found that a fresh scheme was essential to draw off his attention from his distempered thoughts. He was unable, he says, to produce another page of original poetry, for as he did not go out of himself for his materials he soon exhausted the stock of his experience.<sup>1</sup> In his early manhood, when he had read Homer with his fellow-Templar, Mr. Alston, and had compared the original with the translation of Pope, they were so disgusted to find that puerile conceits, extravagant metaphors, and modern tinsel had been substituted for the majesty and simplicity of the Grecian, that they were often on the point of burning his unfaithful representative. Wakefield has shown abundantly in his edition of Pope's Homer that Pope was unable to construe Greek. He translated from translations, and was not scholar enough to detect their gross and manifold deviations from the original. "I would undertake," Cowper said of his Homer, "to produce numberless passages from it, if need were, not only ill translated, but meanly written."<sup>2</sup> The recollection of his former studies came back upon Cowper when he was at a loss for employment, and induced him, as an

<sup>1</sup> [To Newton, Jan. 13, 1787.]

<sup>2</sup> To Lady Hesketh, Feb. 27, 1786.

experiment, to take up the Iliad and turn a few lines into blank verse. With no other design than the amusement of the hour he went on with the work, till, pleased with his success, he resolved to translate both the Epics of Homer.<sup>1</sup> He found Weston "a situation favourable to the business." He had a great dislike to noise, and had written in the Task of

Groves, if unharmonious, yet secure  
From clamour, and whose very silence charms.<sup>2</sup>

"Here," he said of Weston, "is no noise, save that of the birds hopping on their perches and playing with their wires."<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Unwin and Lady Hesketh were enjoined to silence while he sat translating,<sup>4</sup> though from habit he learned to write in the general room in spite of constant intrusions.<sup>5</sup> He determined that he would accomplish at least forty lines a day; and as he was firm in his purpose, and never intermitted his task, the vast project proceeded rapidly.<sup>6</sup> He had been two years engaged upon it when it was interrupted by his illness, and he resumed it with eagerness the moment his madness abated.

"It is but seldom," Cowper had written in 1781, "and never except for my amusement, that I translate, because I find it disagreeable to work by another man's pattern; I should at least be sure to find it so in a business of any length."<sup>7</sup> This is curious when contrasted with his perseverance in translating Homer. Equally so was his adoption of blank verse instead of the rhyme of Pope. After he had published the Task, he said to Unwin, "I do not intend to write any more blank. It is more difficult than rhyme, and not so amusing in the composition."<sup>8</sup> Part

<sup>1</sup> To Newton, Jan. 13, 1787.

<sup>2</sup> [*The Task*, book iii. lines 134, 135.]

<sup>3</sup> To Lady Hesketh, Sept. 13, 1788.

<sup>4</sup> To Newton, Nov. 29, 1788.

<sup>5</sup> To Hurdis, Aug. 9, 1791.

<sup>6</sup> To Unwin, Oct. 22, 1785.

<sup>7</sup> The same, May 23, 1781.

<sup>8</sup> To Unwin, Oct. 20, 1784.



of the difficulty he found in his own experience was that "rhyme is apt to come uncalled, and to writers of blank verse is often extremely troublesome."<sup>1</sup> But he had a profound admiration for it, and spoke of the "delightful music" of Milton's *Paradise Lost*.<sup>2</sup> "You delight me," he wrote to Bagot, "when you call *blank* verse the English *heroic*; for I have always thought, and often said, that we have no other verse worthy to be so entitled." "That Johnson," he added, "who wrote harmoniously in rhyme, should have had so defective an ear as never to have discovered any music at all in blank verse, till he heard a particular friend of his reading it, is a wonder never sufficiently to be wondered at."<sup>3</sup> "Oh, how I could thrash his old jacket," he said, "till I made his pension jingle in his pocket!"<sup>4</sup> And he quoted with pleasure a letter from Colman on his own translation, in which he said that he thought "blank verse infinitely more congenial to the magnificent simplicity of Homer's hexameters, than the confined couplets, and the jingle of rhyme."<sup>5</sup>

Cowper's first version was full of the quaint language of the writers of the fifteenth century, which he imagined was the kind of English that made the closest approach to the simplicity of the Greek. His friends objected to his obsolete phraseology. He began by altering it with reluctance, and ended by wondering that he had ever adopted it. In deference to the friends to whom he submitted copies of his translation, he also removed most of the elisions which disfigured his first attempts. This was in a measure against his own judgment. He considered that "the unacquaintedness of modern ears with the divine harmony of Milton's numbers, and the principle upon which he constructed them, is the cause of the quarrel that the public had with elisions in blank verse,"<sup>6</sup> where, he said,

<sup>1</sup> Notes on *Paradise Lost*, book ii. line 220.

<sup>2</sup> To Unwin, Oct. 31, 1779.

<sup>3</sup> To Bagot, Feb. 26, 1791.

<sup>4</sup> To Unwin, Oct. 31, 1779.

<sup>5</sup> To Lady Hesketh, May 8, 1786.

<sup>6</sup> To Bagot, Aug. 31, 1786.

"they have often an agreeable and sometimes a very fine effect," though he admitted that "too frequently employed, or unskilfully, they may prove indeed deformities."<sup>1</sup> He told Lady Hesketh, who was one of those who objected to the elisions in his specimens, that "some of the most offensive" of them were occasioned by "vexatious objections made without end" to his translation by Johnson, the publisher, and his friend Fuseli, which made him alter and alter, till at last he did not care how he altered.<sup>2</sup> He promised Lady Hesketh, Newton, and others that he would "dismiss as many of them as he could without sacrificing energy to sound."<sup>3</sup> "I bestowed two mornings in the last week," he wrote to Lady Hesketh, March 20, 1786, "on the extirpation of elisions only. I displaced, I suppose, not less than thirty, some of them horrible creatures, and such as even I myself was glad to be rid of." Among the few he retained was the elision in *the*. "The perpetual use of this abominable intruder in our language," he said, "is to us miserable poets attended with great inconveniences," unless elisions are permitted. Nevertheless he adds that he will even "allow to *the* his whole dimensions wherever it can be done."<sup>4</sup>

Cowper approved of roughness and irregularity in particular lines, and defended it by references to the practice of Milton. "I use all possible diligence," he wrote to Lady Hesketh, "to give a graceful gait and movement to such lines as rather hobbled a little before, with this reserve, however, that when the sense requires it, or when for the sake of avoiding a monotonous cadence of the lines, of which there is always a danger in so long a work, it shall appear to be prudent, I still leave a verse behind me that has some uneasiness in its formation."<sup>5</sup> In his view, the rugged lines, when the purpose was not to relieve

<sup>1</sup> Commentary on *Paradise Lost*, book i. line 39.

<sup>2</sup> To Lady Hesketh, May 8, 1786.

<sup>3</sup> The same, March 6, 1786; to Newton, April 1, 1786.

<sup>4</sup> To Lady Hesketh, March 6, 1786.      <sup>5</sup> The same, March 20, 1786.

the "monotonous cadence," were introduced to fit the sound to the sense. The idea to his mind was emphasised by the harshness of the language. The countenance in anger, grief, and mirth differs from its placid expression when the man is unmoved, and Cowper would have the same sort of diversity in the music of poetry. The theory is suited to those who read with his perceptions, but the multitude have not this kind of sensibility, and it is doubtful whether it has any solid foundation as a law binding upon cultivated minds. If there should be this fitness in sound between language and the ideas expressed, the rule should apply to prose as well as to verse. But in the records of eloquence there is no finer passage than Burke's description of Hyder Ali's descent on the Carnatic, and none in which the masterly language that describes its horrors could be freer from any correspondence in sound to the enormities it conveys with such stupendous power.

Cowper's corrections amounted to a re-translation of the work, and his re-translation went through two elaborate revisions. It appeared in 1791. Five years of incessant labour had been expended on the undertaking, nor was it time thrown away. He said himself, when he had finished it, that he was "sensible that, except as an amusement, it was never worth meddling with."<sup>1</sup> But his Homer is a great performance. He has preserved the vivid pictures, the naked grandeur, and the primitive manners of the original. He considered it "one of the great defects of Pope's translation that it is licentious," that is, that he took licences with his original. "Whatever be said of mine," he added, "it shall never be said that it is not faithful."<sup>2</sup> When Newton expressed hopes in a letter that, if he was disappointed in its reception, he would not feel excessively mortified, he replied, "I will tell you honestly, I have no fears upon the subject. My predecessor has given me every advantage."<sup>3</sup> He does

<sup>1</sup> To Newton, June 24, 1791.

<sup>2</sup> To Newton, Feb. 18, 1786.

<sup>3</sup> To Newton, Feb. 18, 1786.



not excel Pope more in fidelity than in true poetic power. It was not an adequate translation, which was an impossibility; but it was the translation of a man who understood his original, and appreciated its greatness, who had the command of a poet's language, and comprehended the mechanism, the variety, and music of blank verse. It is therefore in keeping with his poetical reputation. The style may seem austere at a casual glance, but will be found on a close acquaintance to be full of picturesqueness, dignity, and force. In the passages where he creeps, the old bard himself has seldom soared very high. The combined majesty and melody of the ancient measure could not be approached, but the blank verse of Cowper's translation has a fuller swell and greater variety of cadence than his *Task*, and is, in general, sufficient to sustain the ideas. Southey considered it, of all the English translations, "that which least disfigures the original."<sup>1</sup> "My father," says Rogers, "used to recommend Pope's Homer to me, but with all my love for Pope, I never could like it. I delight in Cowper's Homer; I have read it again and again."<sup>2</sup> Thomas Cambell greatly admired it, and told Dyce "that he used to read it to his wife, who was often moved to tears by some passages of it."<sup>3</sup> Cowper's version is not, and never will be popular, but those who turn from the English Homer with distaste would probably be devoid of a genuine relish for the Greek.

In 1789, while Homer was still in progress, John Johnson, then an undergraduate at Cambridge, and grandson of Roger Donne, who was the brother of Cowper's mother, made a pilgrimage into Buckinghamshire, out of pure admiration for his kinsman's works. Charmed with the young man's simplicity, enthusiasm, and affection, the poet treated him like a son. Through his means a communication was opened with some of the great author's other maternal relations; and a cousin, Mrs. Bodham, sent

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondence with Caroline Bowles*, p. 224.

<sup>2</sup> *Dyce's Table Talk of Samuel Rogers*, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, note.

as a present to Weston the portrait of his mother, which produced the famous lines that are known and treasured by thousands who care little for poetry. He tells us that he wrote them "not without tears,"<sup>1</sup> and without tears they have rarely been read. The description was as usual the literal transcript of his feelings, and the language was the worthy vehicle of his lifelong affection for the revered mother who inspired them. He struck a chord which found an echo in every heart that ever loved; and the touching allusions to his own tragic story redoubled the pathos. It is the glorious distinction of Cowper that he is the domestic poet of England, and has his hold upon the mind by more pervading and charming sentiments than any other writer of verse.

His Homer dismissed, Cowper had again to seek a scheme on which to employ his thoughts. He was distressed that he could not find another subject on which he could write to his satisfaction. He tried the "Four Ages of Man," but could not please himself.<sup>2</sup> In the autumn of 1791 his publisher projected a splendid edition of Milton's Works, and engaged him to translate the Latin poems and annotate the English. Cowper said that at this time he had only twenty books in the world, and two of these were not his own.<sup>3</sup> He wrote, in 1792, that incidents of his life had deprived him of a valuable collection—partly inherited from his father, partly from his brother, partly made by himself—so that he possessed a paucity of materials for the undertaking. He was, however, "tolerably well provided by the kindness of a few friends," who had picked "from their shelves everything that they thought might be useful."<sup>4</sup> Hayley was employed about the same time to write a Life of the illustrious bard for another edition; and the newspapers represented the two editors as antagonists. Upon this Hayley sent a sonnet and a letter to Cowper disclaiming

<sup>1</sup> To Lady Hesketh, April 30, 1790.

<sup>2</sup> [The same, June 23, 1791.]

<sup>3</sup> [To Bagot, March 18, 1791.]

<sup>4</sup> [To Park, Feb. 19, 1792.]

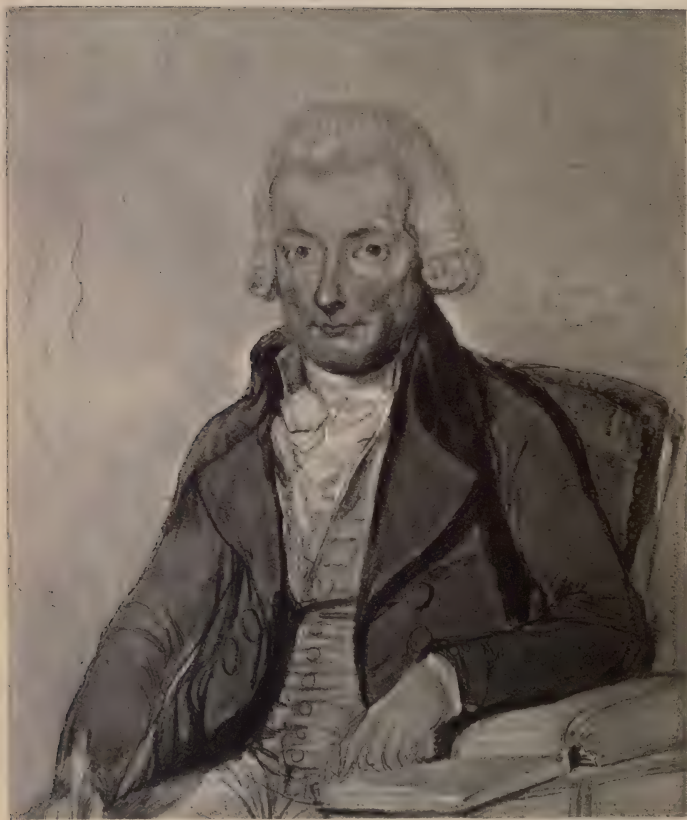
the rivalry, and expressing the warmest admiration of his poetry. From being total strangers, a vehement friendship sprang up between them. An invitation to Weston was accepted by Hayley. The personal intercourse increased their mutual attachment, and "dear brother" was the title they bestowed on one another. Shy and reserved as Cowper was, and little as he was disposed to seek acquaintances, he was no sooner brought in contact with a congenial spirit than his social feelings flamed forth. His morbid moods unfitted him for general society, but he delighted in the companionship of intimates who understood his mental condition and humoured it. They diverted his thoughts from himself, and next to his pen, were the principal solace that his state allowed. He welcomed each person in succession who could answer the end, such as Newton, Lady Austen, Lady Hesketh, John Johnson, and Hayley. His later correspondence glows with affection for the new friends who were attracted to him by the delight they had received from his writings. But he did not long enjoy this accession to his pleasures. In December, 1791, Mrs. Unwin had a slight paralytic attack. "I feel," he said, "the shock in every nerve. God grant that there may be no repetition of it."<sup>1</sup> The repetition came nevertheless, and with increased severity, in May, 1792. She lost her powers of speech, and the use of her legs and right arm, and could neither read, nor knit, nor do anything to amuse herself. "I have suffered," wrote the poet, "nearly the same disability in mind on the occasion, as she in body."<sup>2</sup> He abandoned Milton, took upon himself the office of nurse, and wore out his strength and spirits in attending on her. He who had been unable to bear his burden without her assistance had now to carry her load as well as his own. Bowed down by the double pressure, his gloom increased upon him. His dreams were more troubled; he heard voices more frequently, and their language was more threatening. He was prevailed upon

<sup>1</sup> [To Rose, Dec. 21, 1791.]

<sup>2</sup> [To Bagot, June 7, 1792.]



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*Walker & Cockerell, ph. sc.*

*William Cowper  
after a drawing by L. F. Abbott.*

to visit Hayley at his place in Sussex, in the hope that his patient would be benefited by the change. His long seclusion and his shattered nerves made a stage-coach journey appear more alarming to him than a campaign would be to men of sterner stuff. He set off in August, 1792, and remained at Eartham six or seven weeks.

It was during this stay that Romney executed his celebrated portrait of Cowper. It is the representation of a spirit perturbed to the point of frenzy. Strangely blind to the expression which glared out from it with painful vehemence, Cowper says in the sonnet he addressed to the painter—

But this I mark,—that symptoms none of woe  
 In thy incomparable work appear :  
 Well! I am satisfied it should be so,  
 Since, on maturer thought, the cause is clear ;  
 For in my looks what sorrow couldst thou see  
 When I was Hayley's guest, and sat to thee ?

A more happily turned compliment could not have been penned, and a poet less ingenuous than Cowper might be suspected of having misrepresented the expression of the portrait to give scope for the graceful conclusion to the piece.<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Unwin derived no substantial advantage at Eartham, and shortly afterwards grew weaker both in mind and body. Cowper said of the lines on his mother's picture that he composed them with more pleasure than any he had ever written, with a single exception, and that exception was the sonnet in which he celebrated the devoted woman whom one of his friends described "as an angel in everything but her face." The poet now addressed to her

<sup>1</sup> Southey's mode of accounting for Cowper's mistaken impression is singular. "It was likely enough that Cowper would perceive no vestige of melancholy in this portrait, the expression being nothing more than what he was accustomed to see every morning when he looked in the glass" (vol. ii. p. 59). But it was exactly because he was accustomed to see the melancholy in the glass that he expected to see it in the portrait, and the peculiarity he noticed was its absence. The lines do not admit of any second interpretation.



a more famous piece. His verses "To Mary" are among the most touching and beautiful ever penned. The intensity of his affection for his poor paralytic informs every line, and is summed up in the exclamation, "*My Mary!*" which forms the burden to each stanza. Simple as is the phrase, he has made it speak volumes of love and tenderness by its connection and repetition.

The steady decline of his "Mary's" understanding dragged his down along with it. In a letter to Teedon, written in November, 1792, he narrates his condition.<sup>1</sup> He says, "To avoid constant repetition of the same complaints, which is tiresome even to myself, I shall give you my intelligence, I believe, for the future, in the form of a journal. On the night of the 13th I entered on the practice recommended by you, and used the evening collect, paraphrasing it a little, and instead of *perils* and *dangers*, which are the same thing, praying to be delivered from all perils and *terrors*. That night my sleep was frequently broken, but not much disturbed. In the morning I used the proper collect, omitting, to the best of my remembrance, the word *safely*, because it seems to me that whosoever has lost all his evidences, and all his hopes, cannot possibly be said to have been brought *safely* on. Wednesday night was much like the night preceding, and Thursday much such another day as Wednesday. *Friday, November 16.*—I have had a terrible night,—such an one, I believe I may say, God knows no man ever had. Dreamed that, in a state of insupportable misery, I looked through the window of a strange room, being all alone, and saw preparations making for my execution,<sup>2</sup> that it was but about four

<sup>1</sup> Southey quotes extracts from Cowper's letters to Teedon immediately before the date of this letter and immediately after, but clearly had not seen this one, which gives, on the whole, a more definite view of Cowper's state than any of the passages he quotes. [Teedon was a poor school-master at Olney, who was pensioned by Cowper and Mrs. Unwin.—Southey's *Cowper*, vol. ii. p. 36.]

<sup>2</sup> He sometimes called his consignment to the flames, his "execution."

days distant, and that then I was destined to suffer everlasting martyrdom in the fire, my body being prepared for the purpose, and my dissolution made a thing impossible. Rose overwhelmed with infinite despair, and came down into the study, execrating the day when I was born with inexpressible bitterness, and while I write this I repeat those execrations in my very soul, persuaded that I shall perish miserably, and as no man ever did. Everything is, and for twenty years has been, lawful to the enemy against me.<sup>1</sup> Such was Friday morning, and the rest of the day, especially the evening, unfit for description. *Saturday, 17.*—Had much less sleep than usual, but the sleep I had was quiet. Terror turns to wrath, wrath prompts unadvised speech, unadvised speech brings guilt, and guilt terror again. In this circle I have moved, and all my waking hours in the night, and my rising in the morning, have been miserable accordingly. It is now past ten in the forenoon, and I seem settling into a calm, habitual melancholy, which is the happiest frame of mind I ever know."

Lady Hesketh paid Cowper her annual visit in the winter of 1793. He then hardly stirred from the side of Mrs. Unwin, who was fast relapsing into second childhood. He took no exercise, nor used his pen, nor even read a book, unless to her. To watch her sufferings in bleak despair, and to endeavour to relieve them, was his sole business in life. By the spring of 1794 he was reduced to that state that he refused to taste any food except a small piece of toasted bread dipped in water. He did not open his letters, nor would suffer them to be read to him. Lord Spencer procured him a pension from the Crown of £300 a year, and he was not in a condition to be told of the circumstance. He abandoned his little avocations of netting and putting together maps, and, goaded by the restless spirit within him, walked up

<sup>1</sup> That is, he never recovered from the despair of salvation engendered by the attack of 1773.

and down the room for entire days. He lived in hourly terror that he should be carried away, and once stayed from morning till evening in his room, keeping guard over his bed, under the apprehension that somebody would get possession of it in his absence, and prevent his lying down on it any more.

The sole hope of his restoration was in change of scene and air, and with much difficulty young Johnson at last prevailed on the sufferers to accompany him to Tuddenham, in Norfolk. The transference was effected in July, 1795, and in August they moved on to the village of Mundesley, on the coast,—a place impressive from the gloom of its sea and cliffs, but ill suited to cheer the desolate mind of Cowper. "The most forlorn of beings," he wrote on his arrival, "I tread the shore under the burden of infinite despair, and view every vessel that approaches the coast with an eye of jealousy and fear, lest it arrive with a commission to seize me."<sup>1</sup> The feeling that he should be suddenly laid hold of, and hurried away to torment, continued to grow on him. The postponement of his fate, times out of number, had no effect in diminishing his confidence, each time the impression recurred, that it would now at last prove true. In January, 1796, he informed Lady Hesketh, "that in six days' time, at the latest, he should no longer foresee but feel the accomplishment of all his fears," and in February he wrote her a letter, in which he bid her adieu, and told her that, unless her answer arrived next day, he should not be on earth to receive it.<sup>2</sup>

His afflicted Mary was the first to be released. She calmly sunk to her rest, in the December of this year, at East Dereham, in Norfolk, where Mr. Johnson had taken a house. Cowper uttered no allusion to her danger, nor seemed to be conscious of it, till the morning of her dissolution, when, on the servant coming in to open his shutters, he said, "Sally, is there life above stairs?" A

<sup>1</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, Aug. 27, 1795.]

<sup>2</sup> [The same, Feb. 19, 1796.]



few hours after she breathed her last, and when he was informed of it he conceived the idea that she was not really dead, but would wake up in the grave, and undergo, on his account, the horrors of suffocation. He therefore expressed a wish to see her, and under the influence of his preconception, he fancied he observed her stir. On a closer view he plainly discovered that she was a corpse. He flung himself to the other side of the room, as from an object that was much too painful to behold, and never mentioned her again. He was a broken reed, and had been accustomed to lean on her for a quarter of a century, and he knew that he could never replace her. Her memory was associated with happier days, and to speak of her in his present depths of misery would have aggravated his distress.

In the winter of 1797 he was beguiled into revising his translation of Homer, and worked at it steadily as of old, till he had gone through the whole. Southey observes of it that, while "Cowper's letters show how fully he had considered the subject of versification, and how completely his opinion was formed, yet in the second edition he proceeds upon the opposite principle of making it all smooth as a bowling-green."<sup>1</sup> He completed his task on the 8th of March, 1798, and a few days afterwards he wrote the *Castaway*. This was his final effort at original composition. The rack of mind he had undergone for years allowed his genius to burn at intervals as brightly as ever. His last is one of his most powerful pieces, and its only fault is that it is too painful in its pathos.

During the two remaining years of his pilgrimage he attempted nothing of more moment than to translate little Latin poems into English, or English poems into Latin. "My mind," he wrote to Lady Hesketh, July 26, 1798, "has long ceased to be subject to my will, and I despair that it will ever obey it more." "The greater part of his time," he said, he "spent in the same hopeless manner,

<sup>1</sup> [Cowper's *Works*, vol. vii. pp. vii, viii.]

every day, and often every hour, being made to seem the last." In the spring of 1800 symptoms of dropsy appeared in his feet, and quickly proved fatal. A physician who visited him asked him how he felt? "Feel!" he replied; "I feel unutterable despair." Such despair he continued to feel while consciousness remained, and he expired on the 25th of April, to wake up from his delusion in a happier world.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Cowper was buried in one of the chapels adjoining the north transept of the church of East Dereham, Norfolk, where the monuments to him and Mrs. Unwin, with the inscriptions written by Hayley (Southey's *Cowper*, vol. ii. p. 155), are still preserved. The chapel is now popularly called "the Cowper Chapel."]

## LORD THURLOW

THURLOW was born in the same year, and nearly in the same month, with Cowper, December 9, 1731. His name was entered at Caius College, Cambridge, on October 5, 1748, and his age is stated in the entry to have been seventeen. From early boyhood he had been daring and self-willed, had managed at school, by a mixture of cleverness and audacity, to keep up a species of rebellion against his masters, and had carried a spirit of insubordination with him to college, which compelled him to leave before he had taken his degree. His stay had lasted about two years and a quarter, and it was not till Cowper had been upwards of a year and a half in London that the chances of life, when they were between nineteen and twenty, brought him and Thurlow together at the office of Mr. Chapman, the solicitor to whom both were articulated. His impatience of control at school and college had not shown itself in a refusal to learn customary lessons. Emulation was a passion with him, and his ambition made him a genuine scholar. Neither his classical nor his legal studies diminished his relish for the pleasures and pursuits of the world around him, and excelling in talk, grave and gay, he mixed at times in his juvenile period with the companionable class of comparative idlers at Cambridge and London. To be "resolute and industrious," we are told by Cowper, were two of his leading characteristics,<sup>1</sup> and he never allowed

<sup>1</sup> [To Unwin, July 18, 1778.]



his lighter tastes to interfere in any serious degree with his ulterior objects. When he lost his day he read late at night or early in the morning. Shallow views, abounding in inconsistencies, and adulterated by fiction, are frequent in Lord Campbell's *Lives of the Chancellors*; and, sharing the Whig animosity to Thurlow, he has adopted the evidence of caricature and party virulence with some additions of his own invention. He thus naturally asserts that Thurlow's appearances at his London club, when earnest lawyers were hard at work, was a senseless "affectation," to beget the opinion that he was above the drudgery of ordinary students.<sup>1</sup> This charge, founded on a hidden and purely conjectural motive, was a sheer assumption, to discredit Thurlow. All mankind must have their seasons of rest, and in this respect varieties of habit are endless. Johnson went to bed when early-risers were getting up. Thurlow divided his hours of work and play in the manner his diversions required, and doubtless, in addition, would now and then give way to fits of laziness. To exchange mental toil for its contrary is a common infirmity among men the most gifted. No one could write with more prolific energy than Johnson, who, by his own confession, "always felt an inclination to do nothing,"—an inclination to which he yielded for months together when not roused to exert himself by some imperious influence. He was the direct opposite of his friend, the illustrious Burke, who was able to say that "he had a kind of earnest and anxious perseverance of mind moulded into his constitution," which enabled him to follow up an object "without regard to convenience, ease, or pleasure." Thurlow allowed that his own disposition was to be truant, and we may conclude he would oftener have obeyed the propensity if it had not been counteracted by his eagerness to attain distinction.

His splendid talents ripened quickly. Cowper's verses, in 1778, "On the Promotion of Edward Thurlow to the

<sup>1</sup> [Campbell's *Lives of the Chancellors*, 4th ed., vol. vii. p. 164.]

Lord High Chancellorship of England," turn entirely on the circumstance that in his "sportive days" he had displayed "all the skill of age." The exalted opinion the poet formed of him at the commencement of their acquaintance was confirmed by twelve years of the closest intimacy, and in 1762, when their friendship was some eleven years old, he had arrived at the conviction that his companion's extraordinary endowments must conduct him by right to the topmost station in his profession. His position at the bar occasioned his advancement, in the year of his friend's prophecy, to the rank of king's counsel, but he had six more years to wait before he had a seat in the House of Commons. Cowper had no misgivings, and after his forecast had become a fact, he said to Hill, "I do not plume myself much on my sagacity, because it required but little to foresee that Thurlow would be Chancellor."<sup>1</sup> His appearance denoted the vigour of his intellect. "That inimitable head of his," is one of the phrases Cowper uses in speaking of him.<sup>2</sup> He was a man of massive build, tall and sturdy; his features were regular, and somewhat hard, and his complexion swarthy; his eyes were large, round, and dark, and had a keen expression; his black and bushy eyebrows were remarkable from their size, and his hair in colour and lusty growth matched his eyebrows. He had a tinge of ebony throughout, and "Niger" is the name which Cowper gives him in his poem entitled Valediction, where he sums up the general effect of his commanding countenance by ascribing to him "a senatorial dignity of face." In the verses on his promotion, he says that, possessed of "genius" by nature, "fair science had poured on him the light of truth," insomuch that at his first start in life he had displayed an eloquence and discernment which excited the wonder of his elders,—“the experienced and the sage.” In Valediction, written when he was out of humour with his old friend for neglecting him, he dwelt

<sup>1</sup> [To Hill, March 16, 1780.]

<sup>2</sup> [To Lady Hesketh, April 17, 1786.]

anew on his extraordinary talents, sound sense, well-furnished brain, and ready language "to press with energy his ardent thoughts." The "discernment" and the "ardent thoughts" were the basis of his eloquence. He did not trust to rhetorical verbiage, but to close reasoning drawn out in brief sentences, and clothed in simple language. Cowper could only have heard him at the bar, and it was there that the singular force and acuteness of his arguments gained him his earliest reputation. His oratory in Parliament was of the same sterling order. Throughout the ten years he sat in the House of Commons, Burke, his opponent in politics, was one of his constant auditors, and he has specified the character of his speeches in calling him, after he was Chancellor, "a great and learned magistrate, distinguished for his strong and systematic understanding." We have the kindred judgment of Gibbon, who was a fellow-Member with him during the last two or three years before he was raised to the woolsack. Contrasting the abilities in attack and defence of Lord North's two ablest supporters, he says that the "Minister might indulge in a short slumber whilst he was upholden on either hand by the majestic sense of Thurlow, and the skilful eloquence of Wedderburne."<sup>1</sup> However momentous the subject, however formidable his opponents, however august the assembly, he was always ready to stand forth, undaunted and self-possessed, to make good his cause.

The qualities which illumined his speeches shone forth in his conversation. Notwithstanding "the skilful eloquence of Wedderburne," he was Johnson's example of a commonplace person in contrast to the colloquial brilliancy of Thurlow. "I never heard anything from him in

<sup>1</sup> Since Lord Campbell's death it became known that Gibbon wrote portions of his Autobiography several times over, and Lord Sheffield, to whom he bequeathed his manuscripts, put together the published version from the collective series. The description of the oratory of Wedderburne and Thurlow is not in any one of them, but it was unquestionably copied from some paper by Gibbon, and was not forged by Lord Sheffield.



company," Johnson said to Boswell, "that was at all striking, and depend upon it, it is when you come close to a man in conversation that you discover what his real abilities are: to make a speech in a public assembly is a knack. Now I honour Thurlow; Thurlow is a fine fellow; he fairly puts his mind to yours."<sup>1</sup> Stronger still was Johnson's testimony, on a subsequent occasion, to Thurlow's supremacy in the conflict of mind with mind. "I have mentioned," Boswell writes, "what Johnson said of him to me when he was at the bar; and after his lordship was advanced to the seals he said of him, 'I would prepare myself for no man in England but Lord Thurlow. When I am to meet with him I should wish to know a day before.'"<sup>2</sup> It is needless to quote the tributes of lesser men to his luminous exposition of perplexed subjects, and his rare dexterity in reasoning upon them. Lord Campbell himself bears witness to the general verdict by his avowal, "I found that any of Thurlow's surviving contemporaries with whom I chanced to converse entertained the highest opinion of what they denominated his 'gigantic powers of mind.'"<sup>3</sup>

In the face of this admission, and the acknowledgment that he "often displayed in debate vigorous reason and manly eloquence," the author of his *Life* could venture to lay down and reiterate the following propositions, in company with others of a like nature—that "it was a rude, bantering, turbulent, impressive style of oratory which characterised *all* Thurlow's parliamentary harangues, and which gained him such a reputation with contemporaries"; that "his extreme arrogance made him dreaded both by friend and foe"; that when, according to his habit, "he resorted to reasoning he must have known to be sophistical, or made a convenient assertion trusting largely to the ignorance of his audience, he spoke in such a loud voice, and with such an air of authority, that no one ventured to

<sup>1</sup> [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 717.]

<sup>2</sup> [*Ibid.*, p. 772.]

<sup>3</sup> [Campbell's *Lives of the Chancellors*, vol. vii. p. 156.]

contradict him"; and that altogether it was chiefly "by his assuming manner that he imposed on the age in which he lived."<sup>1</sup> Where, in this account, is the man who was distinguished in Parliament for his strong and systematic understanding, deducing his conclusions from fundamental principles; where the man whose everyday talk tasked the faculties of the invincible Johnson to such a degree that he desired in his case, what he disdained in any other, a previous notice that he might be prepared to compete with him? The disparaging qualities enumerated by Lord Campbell were not those, as he asserts, which gained him his reputation with everybody, and therefore, among the rest, with Burke and Gibbon, with Johnson and Cowper, who do not even mention them. He won their applause, not by the strength of his voice, but by the strength of his matter; not by rude, turbulent declamation, however impressive, but by his logical prowess; not by his arrogance and false pretensions, but by his cogent replies and stinging retorts, though neither he nor his principal antagonists could carry on the heated war of party politics with a fictitious show of meekness and modesty. It required an astonishing credulity in his biographer to believe that the famous contemporaries who shared in his conversation, and listened to his speeches, had mistaken bluster, insolence, and vapouring rhetoric for an evidence of unwonted intellect, while a critic, who had none of their advantages, should be able by a jaunty, incoherent narrative, to correct their amazing delusion, and be entitled to say boastfully in conclusion, "Posterity may regard Thurlow as a very ordinary mortal."

It would be out of place here, and unprofitable anywhere, to go on exposing the misstatements, false inferences, and open contradictions, in a crude, ill-digested compilation. It is enough to be assured that, during the London section of Cowper's life, which was the principal season of his education in English literature, his chief, and by far his

<sup>1</sup> [Campbell's *Lives of the Chancellors*, vol. vii. p. 174.]

most accomplished friend, was not a charlatan, nor he himself an undiscerning dupe. A few more traits of this "very ordinary mortal" remain to be told that we may form the best idea we can of the poor deserts which secured the lasting admiration of Cowper. In each of the descriptions he gives of him in verse he has included "grace" among his prominent distinctions—styled "manly grace" in *Valediction* to denote that it was not of the foppish, artificial order, for everything foppish was alien to his nature, and his dress was negligent. Richly furnished with physical gifts—a fine stature, a "senatorial dignity of face," a voice clear, mellow, and when he was roused, sonorous—the added grace completed the imposing appearance which lent force to his earnest delivery of his speeches. The grace in private life included graciousness. He was polite with a courtesy that was not formal or distant, and his language in talk was familiar and unconstrained. A master of argument, he was inclined to be militant, and gave free scope to his talent for sarcastic humour, his raillery at times being harsh and unrefined. But these caustic sallies were not the asperities of contempt or ill-will, but the intellectual pastime of a disputant bent upon victory, and he was reckoned a good-natured, as he was, in some respects, a good-hearted man. That he had enough amiability and warmth of affection to humanise his robust and defiant temperament, might be known from Cowper's phrase, "I loved him." "I could love him heartily," he wrote to Lady Hesketh, April 17, 1786, "if he would but deserve it at my hands; that I did so once is certain," and probably he loved him the more for his intrepid bearing. He states in another letter that, up to the time when their personal intercourse ceased, he had been "loved and valued" by Thurlow.<sup>1</sup>

Thurlow's crying defect was not that he traded on a shallow, counterfeited understanding. His vice was his libertinism. He was licentious with women for years, and

<sup>1</sup> [To Unwin, March 18, 1782.]



the mother of his children was his concubine. He did not need his deeper insight into the constitution of human affairs to tell him the magnitude of the wrong, and the evil of his example. The offence was on the surface, and it is obvious to everyone that a general contempt for the marriage tie must end in a promiscuous herd of children without family training, family habits, and family affections, to the final ruin of civilisation itself. Late in life Cowper reminded him that he had heard him recite passages from *Paradise Lost* in a manner that showed how well he understood the music which belonged to the rhythm of blank verse. In his recitations he could never have ventured to repeat the "Hail, *wedded* Love," from the fourth book of Milton's epic. Every line would have recoiled upon himself, and reminded his hearers that in his own person he had done his part towards the disorganisation of society and the corruption of mankind. In consigning to damnation all persons and circumstances that pleased or displeased him—for the curse in colloquial usage was equally invoked in either case—he had the poor excuse that he followed the practice of his time. "Oaths and blasphemies," said Cowper, "are the common language of this highly favoured, but ungrateful country." Thurlow's oaths were even more profuse than usual, and not seldom more indecorous from the occasions on which he employed them. He may have kept to the abbreviated form in which the name of the Deity is omitted, but the single word was associated with irreverence, and, profanity set aside, a man of his calibre should have been ashamed to emphasize his thoughts by the incessant repetition of a vulgar expletive.

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